PLANT MYTHS & TRADITIONS IN INDIA

Shakti M. Gupta

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FOREWORD

In India trees and plants have been adored not only with devotion but have been affectionately fondled and almost treated as members of a family. Kalidasa mentions kindly spirits like Vanadevatas, who had been companions of Sakuntala in the forest, almost shedding tears when she left her sylvan *home* for her residence in the palace of her husband, the king, and hastened to give her presents of silken garments and jewels worthy of a princess. When Sita was abandoned by Lakshmana in the forest at the command of Rama, Sita's sorrow stirred the trees and plants, and along with animals and birds, they too expressed their grief by shedding flowers like large drops of tears. Parvati makes no difference between her fond son Kumara and a Devadaru sapling almost chosen as her pet off-spring, and she lovingly reared it by watering it with pitchers or water as with her own breast milk. When Aja laments for Indumali, the prince cannot refrain from mentioning with a pane the yet unfulfilled marriage of the two trees that the queen had brought up so lovingly in the hope of getting them married. This

idea of getting trees paired in marriage bespeaks the almost human way in which they were treated. The creeper entwining the tree, spoken of by poets as the beloved clinging to her lord, is a poetic expression of this sympathy for plants, treated almost in human form. In the Vishnusahasranama*,* Vishnu is mentioned as the very embodiment of imposing trees like Udumbara, Asvattha, Asoka and Nyagrodha. Siva is himself conceived as a *yupa,* post fashioned in Khadira or Sami wood. Sami has fire inside it; Rudra *is* also the embodiment of fire. Poets love to use the word Sthanu for Siva and Aparna (lit. leafless) for Parvati to suggest that even the dry tree trunk (sathanu) bears shoots in association with Aparna (saparna). Oshadhis or medicinal plants respond to the light of the moon as effectively as the humans in their joy for moonlight. In the Vedic hymns the oshndhis have been conceived as sentient and in the puraana the Vanadevatas are described as lovable, sylvan deities. The simple faith of the Cheta in MIC *Mrihchhakatika assumes* that the (watchful) eye of the vanadevata is as effective as that of the sun and moon that are witnesses of the good and bad deeds of people on earth. This is a primitive belief that accounts for a true and honest life in the simple and unsophisticated folk of nearly 2000 years ago.

Dr (Mrs) Shakti M. Gupta has to be thanked for writing a delightful book on plant myths and traditions in India, describing individual plants with their scientific nomenclature and the myths and stories associated with each one of them as well as usages and traditions peculiar to them. This is a book of immense interest and I am sure it will be welcomed by all those who desire to know the Indian outlook on life in general and on the vegetable kingdom in particular, as an exceedingly important group among sentient objects that won the hearts of their human neighbours. The Dohada, the Vriksharopa, the Pratishta of the Pipal tree, the worship of the Chaitya-vriksha and other similar beliefs make it essential that the psychological approach towards plants in India should be studied in books like this. I am glad that Dr Gupta has prepared a very interesting study in the true Indian spirit of; affection towards plant life.

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INTRODUCTION

Man has been fascinated by nature since he evolved from his primitive ancestors, the apes. No doubt, to start with he hunted for food mainly by killing the wild animals, but if there was anything on which he could depend with any confidence towards its availability, it was the plant. Not only the fact that a large number of plants provided him with food but also the fact that they provided him with curative medicine and shelter, were perhaps the reasons why he worshipped them rather then the animals which also gave him food.

The reason for a large number of plants not having any commercial use and still associated with myths and traditions are difficult to understand. The only explanation for their association with religious beliefs can be that these plants, perhaps because of the resemblance to the emblem of a particular deity or the name of a sage being associated with them, made the plants holy. For this reason alone a large number of plants are considered sacred in India. There are a large number of trees, popularly called the Bodhi trees, associated with the name of sages who received enlightenment under them, thus making the trees sacred. For instance *Aswattha* (Ficus religiosa) is the bodhi tree of Sakya Muni or Buddha; *Nyagrodha* (Ficus bengalensis) of Kasyapa; Udumbara (Ficus glomerata) of Kanaka muni; *Sirisa* (Albizzia labbek) of Krakuchhanda; *Asoka* (Saraca indica) of Vipaswi; *Pundarika* (Nelumbium speciosum) of Sikhi.

The availability of a plant can be another-reason for its traditional use. Yet there again reasons defy explanation. Rice for instance is ‘a fertility symbol. Its use at religious and marriage ceremonies can be understood in areas where rice is available in plenty. But what defies human understanding is the fact that rice is used for the same reason and purpose even in areas where it is not cultivated. The only explanation for such a cult can be that when the migration of the human race from one corner of the earth to another took place, men took their traditions with them even when those plants were not easily available and often had to be procured from great distances for the said purpose.

There are a large number of plants which are used by people all over India for cures against witchcraft or to remove the effect of the evil eye but the reasons for faith and belief in them is lost in antiquity. For instance, Cheilanthes tenuifolia belonging to the Family Polypodiaceae and called Dodheri by the Santhals of India is highly valued, as the root of the plant is prescribed in a preparation given in sickness attributed to witch-craft or the

evil eye. Similarly the nomadic tribes of Rajasthan tie the leaves of *Pedilanthus* to the neck of small children as an amulet to ward off the evil eye. Among the Oriyan tribe Saoras, an amulet made of bits of the bark of *Trewia nudiflora* is used as protection against Danunkisum. Also a necklace made of the bark of the tree is believed to protect the nursing mother. Similarly *Euphorbia antiquorum* of Family Euphorbiaceae and called *Tridhara* in Hindi, is supposed to possess the power of warding off lightning strokes. *Embelica officinalis* is a tree sacred to the Hindus and is credited with magical properties by the tribesmen. Seeds of *Peganum harmaia* are burnt to drive away evil spirits or to avert the evil eye. The smoke emanating from the burning seeds cleanses the atmosphere of mosquitoes and germs. *Prisni-parni,* identified as *Hermiontis cordifolia,* also as *Glycine debelis* is used as a protection against sorcerers indulging in bringing about abortion. Certain trees like *Semicarpus anacardium, Diospyros melanoxyhn* and *Vitex negundox* are believed to have magical potency and the branches of these trees are used by the Oroan tribes of India to avert the evil eye, repel evil spirits and other evil influences from standing crops. *Aparmarga* (Achyranthes aspera) is used in witchcraft and for medical purposes against Ksetriyas. It is described in *Atharvaveda* as revertive. Because it has reverted leaves, it wards off a spell by causing it to recoil on its user.

Though generally speaking, the idea of the identity of the plant with the deities belonged to the tradition of the Aryan immigration, such as the association of the *Soma* plant with the moon, yet a large number of plants that are associated with the deities belong to the traditional flora of India such as the association of *Tulasi* (Ocimum sanctum) and *Amalaka* (Embelka myrobalam) with Vishnu; *Bilva* (Aegle marmelos) with Siva and the identification of Sri-Lakshmi with the lotus. In such cases the association of the plant with the deities would be pre-Aryan.

The utility of trees in a hot country was recognised by people from very early times. The merit of planting trees is given in many old texts. In Matsya Purana a legend says that Parvati planted an *Asokan* sapling and the gods asked her the merit that would accrue from planting trees. To this Parvati replied: “A Vapi is equal in fruit to 10 wells, a pond to 10 Vapi’s; a son to 10 ponds and a tree is equal in merit to 10 sons. The merit for the performance of rite of consecration of trees and fruit gardens is also mentioned in Agni Purana.

To the Hindus, all plants having the trifoliate arrangement of its leaves, like *Crataeva religiosa* of Family Capparidaceae and called *Varuna* in Hindi are associated with the Trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu, Siva. In South India, its

trifoliate leaves are offered to gods. Also *Bilva* (Aegle marmelos) and *Mandara* (Erythrina inciica) have trifoliate leaf arrangement and are offered to Siva.

Apart from the above associations, a large number of plants are considered auspicious and their flowers are offered at temples or their wood used for the sacred fire ceremony *Homa.* Below are given the names of a few such plants. The flowers of *Clitoris ternate* of Family Papillionaceae, called *Apacjit* in Hindi are used in religious ceremonies. Flowers of *Gudahul* i.e. *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* are the favourite flowers for offering to goddess Kali. Incidently this flower is also a favourite one for incantations in evil designs. The wood of *Aak* (Calatropis gigantea) of Family Asclepiadaceae is used in *Homa* and its flowers and those of *Datura* (Datura fastuosa) of Family Solanaceae are offered to Siva. The flowers of *Euphorbia Hguhria;* called *Sehund* or *Sij* in Hindi are considered sacred to Manasa, the goddess of snakes and are offered at the temple of Manasaji by the tribal and hill people where snake worship is prevalent, particularly in Bengal and South India. The leaves of *Azadirachta indica or Margossa neem* are used in the feast connected with the Lima rites after a death by certain tribes of Orissa. The inflorescence of *Areca catechu* is used in ceremonies on auspicious occasions like marriages in South India and Gujerat. K*usa ghas* i.e. *Eragrostis cynasuroides* of Family Gramineae is sacred to the Hindus and is used in religious ceremonies all over India. The odorous roots of *Dolomisea macroccphala* or *Dhup* are used as incense and its flowers offered at shrines and temples. The sweet scented flowers of *Daphne bholua* of Family Thymelaceae are used as offerings in temples. Also of *Leucas lavenduiaefolia.* And may be because of the sweet scent alone and for no other reason, the wood of *Chandana* or Sandalwood i.e. *Santalum album* of Family Santalaceae is extensively used in religious ceremonies. The" paste made from the wood has a cooling effect and it is believed to remove sins, miseries and sorrows and to augument riches.

In ancient India, an elaborate ritual was laid for each sacred ceremony and plants formed an important niche in the ceremony. Thus for instance at the coronation of Yudhishthira after the battle of Mahabharata there were "Golden jars full to the brim with water, and those made of copper and silver and earth, and flowers, and fried paddy, and *Kusa ghas* (Eragrosds cynasuroides), and cows milk, and sacrificial fuel consisting of the wood of Sami (Acacia suma) *Pippala* (Piper lorigum), *Palasa* (Butea frondosa), and honey and clarified butter and sacrificial ladles made of *Adumvara* (Ficus glomerata) and conches adorned with gold". In Garuda *Purana also* there is

a mention of the ritual use of plants: The twigs of such sacrificial trees or plants e.g. *Arka* (Calatropis gigantea), *Palasa* (Butea monosperma), *Khadira* (Acacia catechu), *Aparmarga* (Achryanthese aspera), *Pippala* (Piper longum), *Udumvara* (Ficus glomerata), *Sami* (Acacia suma), blades of *Durva* (Pao cynasuroides) and *Kusa ghas* (Eragrostis cynasuroides), soaked with curd, honey, clarified butter should be repeatedly cast in the sacrificial fire, in *Homa* ceremonies celebrated for the propitiation of the planets, such as the Sun."

Plants are repeatedly mentioned in connection with customs, traditions and beliefs. In fact no ceremony was complete without some sacred plant being used. For instance in the Mahabharata, Sakra says: 'Rubbed with the astringent powder of the hanging roots of the Banyan tree (Ficus bengalensis) and anointed with the oil of *Priyangu* (Panicum italicum), one should eat the Shashiika paddy mixed with milk. By so doing one gets cleansed of all sins."

The merit of offering flowers, incense and lamps to deities was given to the Daitya king Vali, son of Virochanu, by Sukra of niirign's race when he was the priest of the Daityas. "Flowers gladden the mind, and confer prosperity. The man, who in a state of purity offers flowers unto the deities, finds that the deities become gratified with him and bestow prosperity upon him".

The flowers offered in various months of the year to the various deities are mentioned in Garuda *Parana.* The vow of Ananga-Trayodashi falls on the 13th day of the moon's increase in the month of Marga'sirsha (January). Yoges-vara (Siva) should be worshipped on this day with offerings of *Datura* (Datura stominium), twigs of *Mallika* (Jasminium arborescens), *Vilva* leaves (Aegle marmelos), twigs of Kadamba (Anthocephallus cadamba), sandal paste (Santalum. album); god Nateshwara with *Kunda* flowers (Jasminium pubescens) and *Plaksha* twigs (Butea monosperma). In the month of Phalguna (February-March) god Vivesvara is to be worshipped with *Muruvaka* flowers (Vedala cadai), pot herbs and *Chuta* trees (Mangifera indica), twigs of *Vata* (Ficus bengalensis); in Vaisakh (April) gqd Sambhu to be offered flowers of *Asoka* (Saraca indica), twigs of *Udumbara* (Ficus glomerata) and nutmeg. In the month of Jaistha (May), Pradyumna who is an incarnation of Kama, the god of love, is to be worshipped with *Champaka* flowers (Michelia champaca) *Vilva* twigs_ (Aegle marmelos). In Ashada (June) gods are worshipped with flowers of *Aparmarga* (Achryanthes aspera) and *Agaru* twigs (Aquilaria agallocha). In Sravana *(July)* with *Karavira* flowers (Nerium oleander). In

Asvins (Sept.-Oct.) god Suradhipa, lord of celestials is worshipped with flowers of *Vakusa* (Mimusops elangii), twigs of *Madhavi* (Hiptage madhoblata); in Aswina (September) with *Champaka* flowers (Michelia champaca) and twigs of Khadira *(*Acacia catechu). In Kartika (October-November), Rudra is worshipped with twigs of *Vadari* (Zizyphus jujuba). At the year's end *Puja* is done with milk, pot herbs and lotus flowers (Nelumbium speciosum) are offered to deities. In the Puranas it is said that he who gives libations-of first fruits in the vessels of *Palasa* (Butea monosperma), *Aswattlia* (Ficus reiigiosa), *Plaksha (*Ficus lacor), *Nyagrodha* (Ficus bengalensis), *Kasmari* (Gmelina arborea), *Madhuka (*Jonesia asoka), *Phalgu* (Ficus oppositifolia), *Bilva* (Aegle marmelos), *Venn* (Bamboo) get the benefit of all Yajnas.

Flowers are classified: is fierce, mild and powerful and the flowers that are acceptable to the different deities are of diverse kinds. There is a detailed account in the *Mahabharata* about the types of flowers that ought to be offered to the deities and how. "Those flowers that have an agreeable scent should be offered to the deities; flowers destitute of thorns and white in colour are most acceptable. Garlands of aquatic flowers like the lotus should be offered to Gandharvas, Nagas and Yakshas. Red flowers possessed of keen energy, painful to touch, growing on thorny plants, deep red or black in colour should be offered to evil spirits and unearthly beings. Flowers which gladden the mind and heart, of a beautiful form and agreeable when pressed are worthy of being offered to human beings. Flowers growing on mountains and valleys, beautiful to look at and with an agreeable scent should be offered to the deities. The deities become gratified with the scent of the flowers; the Yakshas and the Rakshasas with their sight; the Nagas with their touch; the human beings with all three, *viz* scent, sight and touch."

All exudations except that of *Boswellia serrate* are agreeable to the deities. The best exudation that is made into *Dhup* or incense is of *Balsamodendron Mukul* and of *Aquilaria agallocha.* It is agreeable to the Yakshas, the Rakshasas and the Nagas. The exudation of *Boswellia serrate* is desired by the Daityas. *Dhups* made of the exudation of *Shorea robusta* and *Pinus deodars* are ordained for human beings". About the offering of lamps: "Light is said to be energy and flame has an upward motion. Hence the gift of light, which is energy, enhances the energy of man". Bhishma advised Yudhishthira: "It is recommended that a man of intelligence should smear his limbs with unguents made of *Priyangu* {Panicum italicum), *Vilva* (Aegle marmelos), *Tagara* (Tabernae montane-coronaria) and *Kesara* {Eclipta alba)." It is interesting to note that most of these plants are highly

medicinal. It is well known that the science of medicinal plants was very well developed in ancient India.

Just as there are religions prejudices in favour of some plants, there are also prejudices against their use. Flowers growing in cemeteries or in places dedicated to the deities are not used in marriages or in rites for prosperity or for acts of dalliance. There is a taboo attached to -wearing-of-garlands-of-red-flowers and -instead flowers of white colour are recommended. Red flowers, however, can be worn in the hair. *Acacia arabica* var. *Telia cupiess* of Family Mimosaceae is never used in any ceremony connected with an auspicious occasion. Its common name being *Ram Kanta* or *Ram Kati,* it is symbolic of Ram's ward and is therefore not considered auspicious. Similarly, the Tamarind tree, inspite of there being many legends connected with it, is never used for auspicious ceremonies as its fruit being very sour, it is believed that the ceremony will turn 'sour' and thus become fruitless and lose its meaning.

Characters and situations are often compared poetically to flowers and plants in Hindu Mythology. For example Kama, badly wounded in the battle of Mahabharata is described as such: "Pierced with those arrows equipped with heads like the calf's tooth, Adiratha's son of broad chest looked resplendent like an *Asoka* (Saraca indica) or *Palasa* (Butea monosperma) or *Salmali* (Salmalia malabaricum) decked with its flowery load or a mountain overgrown with a forest of Sandal trees (Santalum album). Indeed with those numerous-arrows sticking to his body, Kama, o Monarch, looked resplendent like the prince of mountains with its top and glens over grown with trees or decked with flowering *Karnikaras* (Pterospermum accrifolium) or Kimsuka flowers (Butea monosperma).

Sometimes more then one plant has the same common name and it is difficult to find out the right plant to which a particular myth is attributed. For instance, *Mandara, Parijata, Durva* and *Kusa ghas* and *Soma-lata* are the common names of more than one plant. Often the plants are mythical and difficult to identify and confusion increases when they are mixed with plants which exist in the present times. For instance, *Kustha* identified as *Costus speciosus* or *ambicus* is a plant that grew "in the third heaven under the *Aswattha* tree (Ficus religiosa), along with Soma". May be some of the plants mentioned are extinct but the description given of the said plants is too meagre for them to be identified with fossil plants. For instance, in the *Bhagavata Purana,* there is a story of Priyavrata who married Visva-karma's daughter Barhtsmati and by her had ten sons who are all named after Agni. Priya-vrata reigned 400,000,000 years. The Sun-god Aditya moves round

the Sumeru Mountain and sends his rays up to the Loka-loka range, illumining half the regions while the other half remains dark. Priya-vrata who possessed high spiritual powers determined to illuminate the dark regions, so that there was perpetual day-light. To effect this, he followed the Sun-god seven times in his chariot till Brahma appeared before him and said, "Desist, O son, this is not thy assigned duty in the Universe". But since Priya-vrata had already gone round the Sumeru mt the ruts caused by the wheel of his chariot formed the seven oceans which gave rise to the seven Dvipa's: Jambu, Plaksha, Salmali, Kusa, Kraunca, Saka and Pushkara. Each succeeding Dvipa is twice as large as the preceding one. Most of these are named after a sacred tree that grows there.

According to the *Mahabharata,* the eastern side of Meru has a large forest of *Bhadra salas* (identified both as *Anthocephalius cadamba* 'and *Cedrus deodara),* and a huge tree called *Kalamra* (Mangifera indica). This *Kalamra* is always graced with fruits and flowers. It is a Yojana in height and adored by Siddhas and Charanas. People who live on this mountain are good looking, of fair complexion and live up to 10,000 years. Drinking the juice of *Kalamra,* they continue youthful for ever.

On the south of the Nila and north of the Nishadha, there is a huge *Jamvu* tree '(Syzgium cumini, syn. Eugena Jambolena) that is eternal and wish fulfilling. The Dvipa is named Jamvudvipa after the tree *Jamvu.* The height of the tree is a thousand and hundred Yojanas. Two thousand and five hundred cubit measure the circumference of a fruit of that tree. When the, fruit is ripe, it bursts and falls on the ground making a loud noise and a silvery juice pours out of it. This juice becomes a river which passing circuitously round Meru, comes to the region of the Northern Kurus. Drinking that juice, one gets peace of mind, does not feel thirsty again and decrepitude never weakens one.

Sometimes cities are compared to flowers. According to the *Bhagavata Parana* the lotus floats on'the lake, Madhura (Mathura) rares itself on the earth, protected by the Cakra, the disc of Vishnu. Hence it is called Gopala-puri. This Puri is surrounded by twelve forests.

1. Brhad-vana from Brhad or large
2. Madhu-vana from Madhu, a tree (Bassia latifoiia)
3. Tala-vana from Tala, palm tree (Borassus flabbifera)
4. Bahula-vana from Bahula, a tree (Cardamon) (Amomum subulatum or Elettaria cardamornum)
5. Kumuda-vana from Kurnuda, lotus (Nelumbium speciosum)

6. Khadira-vana from Khadira (Acacia catechu)
7. Bhadra-vana from Bhadra (Gmelina asiatica)
8. Bhandlra-vana from Bhandra (Ficus bengalensis)
9. Sri-vana from Sri or Lakshmi. Sribriksha (Aegle marmelos)
10. Loha-vana from Loha, a plant (Aloe agallochum)
11. Brada-vana from Brnda or Tulasi (Ocimum sanctum)

These forests are presided over by 12 Adityas, 11 Rudras, 8 Vasus, 7 Rsis, Brahma, Nanada, the five Vinayakas (Moda, Pramoda, Amoda, Sumukha and Durmukha), Viresvara, Rudresvara, Vises-vara, Gopalas-vara, Bhadres' vara and 24 Siva-Lingas.

Since very early times *Deva Daru* or the Deodar (Cedrus deodara) is considered as the abode of gods, may be because of the lofty, awe inspiring height the tree attains. In the Western Himalayas, particularly in the Kumaon hills and the Kulu valley, people hold the tree sacred and offer iron pieces as their offering to the gods dwelling in the trees. One often comes across trees studded with iron nails as a form of worship mainly to ward off illness, death and destruction of cattle, sheep and crops. Like the worship of Deodars, many trees are worshipped mainly because of the belief that spirits and deities dwell in them. Why iron nails are made as an offering can only be explained from a common Indian belief that iron keeps the evil away. And may be, to the people worshipping the tree, it was not just the gods dwelling in the tree that were important but also the tree itself as it brought rain which was important in an agricultural country.

Trees are worshipped for-various reasons. In-the Pun district of Orissa, a *Tamala* tree (Cinnamomum tamala) growing in the compound of the Sakhigopal temple is worshipped as an incarnation of Krishna. *Jhand* (Prosopis spicigera) is revered in the Punjab. Very often a temple is erected near it or a stone deity placed under the tree with flags and steamers adorning its branches. The tree is believed to have the gift of giving children and women worship it for that. Often even the marriage processions go to the tree before proceeding to the bride's house or the *doli* procession goes first to the *Jhand* tree before the bride enters her new home. Offerings are also made to the tree by smallpox patients.

Just as all animals are believed to possess a soul, similarly the belief that all plants possess a soul is very strong. There are gods and goddesses of trees, shrubs and creepers. They even have a mother called Ira. Ira, a daughter of Daksa and one of the wives of Kashyapa, was the mother of

three daughters. Lata (creeper), Valli (creeping plants) and Virudha. They became in turn mothers of trees, plants and shrubs. Lata created flowerless - wild plants standing in sandy regions and also trees with flowers and fruits. Valli created bushes and grass of all kinds. Ira means water and since the vegetable kingdom cannot subsist without water, Ira was the right choice of a mother for the plants. The association of the vegetation with a goddess is an old one dating back to the Harappa civilization where terracotta figurines of naked female figures have been found with their legs wide apart and a plant issuing from their womb. Quoting from Banerjee the association of the vegetation with the goddess is very well worked out in her Sakambhari aspect *(Markandya Purana,* Devi Mahatmya. This association is still emphasised in the Navapatrika ceremony of the autumn Durga worship in Bengal which shows that the Devi was in a way the personification of the vegetation spirit According to the Markendeya Purana plants and trees were created from the hair of Brahma's body.

The Navapatrika or 'nine planets', are *Rambha* associated with the Plantain (Musa sapient); *Kacvi* (Arum colocasia); *Haridra,* the tumeric plant (Curcuma longa); *Jayanti* or Barley (Hordeum vulgare); *Vilva* (Aegle .marmelos); *Dadima* or pomegranate (Punica granatum); *Asoka* (Saraca indica); *Mana* or *Dhanya* called paddy (Oryza sativa). The nine goddesses presiding over the Individual plants are Brahmani, Kalika, Durga, Karttiki, Siva, Raktadantika, Sokarahita, Camunda, and Lakshmi respectively. These nine forms of the Devi can be described as comprising a variety of the Navadurgas.

A reference to the vanadevattas or the tree spirits is made in Kalidasa's world renowned play *Sakuntala* where the vanadevatta blesses Sakuntala as she leaves for her husband's home. There is a sculpture piece of the *Banyun* tree (Ficus bengalensis) at Mahabodhi near Gaya which shows two human arms extended from the tree, one holding a plate full of food and the other containing a vessel with a drink, towards a man who is ready to receive then. But this is not only a belief held by the Hindus, the presence of tree-spirits is also a very strong Buddhist belief as seen from the Jataka stories.

Marriage of boys and girls to trees is still being practised by certain tribes in India. This is a relic of the primitive age. Among boys such a marriage is usually performed if the prediction is that his first marriage will break. By marrying him to a tree which is considered to be female, the tragedy is averted and later he is married to a girl and she is considered his second wife. In Orissa if a man loses two wives in succession, before he can be married for the third time, he is first married to a tree of *Stribulus asper* or

Morus indica before he is considered free of the curse of becoming a widower again, as the ill-luck is now carried by the tree he is married to. The same custom for girls, however, has a different basis. An unmarried girl's body cannot be consecrated to the fire. In other words, a virgin cannot be cremated and it is the sacred duty of her parents to marry her at the appropriate time to a boy of their own caste. But if for any reason, the father fails to get her married, a marriage is solemnised between her and a tree after which the girl can be given away informally to any boy or to a boy of an-inferior caste. For instance, among the Kunbirs of Gujerat, if a man fails to provide a husband for his daughter, she is married to a bunch of flowers and the flowers are later thrown into a well after which the girl can marry anyone or she is simply given away to any man who is prepared to accept her. In some cases a girl is first married to a tree with a belief that she will imbibe some of the fertility of the tree, before she is married in the normal way to a man. Among the Gauras of Orissa, a girl who fails to get a husband is taken to a forest married to a tree and left tied to it. She is rescued by the first man who comes that way and she becomes his wife informally. Mostly a youth of a lower caste is waiting for the family to depart before he takes her to his home.

So much importance was given to plants, particularly to trees that a whole ritual was laid for the felling of the 'trees and for image making for purposes of worship. Not every wood was used for image making, nor could anyone worship an image unless it was sanctioned by the scriptures. For instance, the images for worship by the Brahmanas are made from *Deodar* (Cedrus deodar), *Candana* (Santalum album), *Sami* (Acacia suma) and *Madhuka* (Bassia latifolia, also identified as Glycyrrhiza glabra); for kshatriyas images are made out of *Arishta* (Sapindus mukorossi), *Aswattha* (Ficus religiosa), *Khadira* (Acacia catechu), *Vilva* (Aegle marmelos); for Vaishas from *Jivaka* (Putranjiva roxburghn), *Khadira* (Acacia catechu), *Sindhuka* (Hibiscus rosa- Sinensis), *Syandana* (Delbergia sissoo); for the Sudras out of *Tinduka* (Diospyros peregrina), *Kesara* (Eclipta alba), *Salya* (Aegle marmelos or Vanguinieria spinosa), *Arjuna* (Terminalia Arjuna), *Amra* (Mangifera indica), and *Sala* (Shorea robusta).

The prescribed ritual for felling the selected tree was an elaborate one. The sculptor had to perform certain rites such as the marking off on its trunk the various sections of the image to be made. Next he had to propitiate the tree with various offerings and to worship at night the gods, manes, Rakshasas, Nagas, Asuras, Ganas and Vinayakas. In the morning, after sprinkling water on the tree and smearing the blade of his axe with honey

and clarified butter, he would cut round the tree rightwards, beginning from the north-east corner.

Just as most gods and goddesses in India are associated with some tree, shrub or creeper, similarly all the nine planets which are believed to control the destiny of man are associated with plants. Planet Ravi (the Sun) after whom *Ravivara* or Sunday is named is offered the burnt offerings of *Aak* plant (Calatropis gigantea). Butea monospermir or Palasa is-sacred to planet *Soma* (the moon) after whom *Somavara* or Monday is named. Planet Mangla (Mars) hence *Manglavara* or Tuesday is identified with Karttikeya and the plant *Khadira* (Acacia catechu) is sacred to him. Planet Buddha (Mercury), hence *Budhavara* or Wednesday has *Aparmargu* (Achryanthes aspera) as its sacred plant. *Aswattha* (Ficus religiosa) is sacred to Planet Brihaspati (Jupiter) after whom *Brihaspativara* or Thursday is named. The plant *Urumbasa* (cannot be identified botanically) is sacred to the planet Sukra (Venus) and' *Sukravara* or Friday is named after him. Saturday or *Sanivara* is named after the Planet Sani (Saturn) and the plant sacred to it is *Sami* (Acacia suma). *Dharbha ghas* (Pao cynasuroides) is sacred to the Planet Rahu and blades of *Kusa ghas* (Eragrostis cynasuroides) to the Planet *Ketu.*

Though generally speaking the Sikhs in India do not worship trees, yet a few specimens are held sacred by them. One is a tree of *Ber* (Zizyphus jujuba) growing in the compound of the Golden Temple at Amritsar which is believed by the Sikhs to be a tree which removes sorrow. Similarly, a tree of *Carissa spinosa* or the sacred Gama, growing in a village called Badal in the Hoshiarpur dis'trict of Punjab, is a tree of great antiquity and is held in great reverence by the Sikhs. Near Bareilly in Uttara Pradesh there is a tree of *Amla* (Embelica officinalis) one branch of which bears sweet fruits and the rest of the tree bears bitter-sour fruits. No doubt a case of mutation in the plant but the Sikhs hold the tree sacred under the belief that one of their Gurus once rested under this tree and the branch which gave him shade, since that time bears sweet fruits.

There is a mention of the birth of plants in Matsya Purana. The legend says that by the power of their penances, Rishis Prachetasa (ten brothers), had protected the plants but Agni burnt them. So the Rishis married Soma-Kanya, Marisha, the daughter of Soma and from this union was born Daksha. Daksha in turn produced on her innumerable plants and trees.

According, to the Vamana Purana the following plants arose as listed below;

1. Lotus (Neiumbium speciosum) from Vishnu's navel.

2. Kadamba (Anthocephallus cadamba) from the forepart of the hand of Kandaripa.

3. Banyan (Ficus bcngalensis) from Manibhadra, the chief of the Yakshas.

4. Datura (Datura fastuosa) from the chest of Siva.

5. *Khadira* (Acacia catechu) from the middle body of Brahma.

6. Bread fruit (Adansonia digitata) from the body of Visvavarman.

7. *Kurchi* flowers (Jasminium pubescens) from the palm of Parvati.

8. *Sindhuvaraka* (Vitex negundo) from the temple of Ganesha.

9 *Palasa* (Butea frondosa) from the right side of Yama.

10. *Udumbara* (Ficus glomerata) from the north-south side of Yama.

11. *Vrsa drig* (Banduvija pentapates) from Rudra.

12. Bamboo (Banduvija pentapates) from Skanda. 13- *Aswattha* (Ficus religiosa) from Ravi.

14. *Sami* (Acacia suma) from Katyani.

15. *Bilva* (Aegle marmelos) from Lakshmi.

16. Reeds (Arundo donax) from the lord of serpents.

17. *Durbha* {Pao cynasuroides) from Vasuki.

The cult of tree worship is as old or older than civilization, in fact almost the first objects to be worshipped were trees. In India this is borne out by a seal discovered at Mohenjodaro, now in Pakistan, which depicts *Aswattha* (Ficus religiosa) being worshipped. This seal dates back to the 3rd or 4th millennium B.C. The worship of trees in India is understandable as the trees not only provided shade in the hot scorching summers, food, and medicine and fuel but the forests 'Meant rain which was essential for a purely agricultural economy. The trees being beneficial to humanity, to protect them became a religion for men and the trees were converted into the abode of spirits, the vanadevattas. To cut down a tree meant depriving the spirit of its home and very often if it became imperative to cut down any tree, special prayers for forgiveness of the tree spirit were performed before a tree was cut down or another abode offered to the Vaimdevatta. Invariably it is not the tree that is worshipped but the spirits residing in them.

The identification of the plant at times gets difficult as a large ‘number of plants have the same common name. In a country like India with many regional languages, a particular common name of a plant is applied to different plants. Also plants that are associated with various gods and goddesses change from one part of India to another. Not only that, but the names of gods and goddesses also differ in different parts of India thus making accurate assessment and Identification of plants at times impossible. Where the Sanskrit name of the plant belongs to more than one plant, only those plants have been identified, the synonym of which suites in a particular reference. To make matters more confusing, myths in various districts overlap. If in one district a particular deity is worshipped with a certain plant, in the next district, either the same plant is offered to a different deity or some other flowers are considered sacred to the same deity.

ACACIA CATECHU

Family Leguminoseae

Sanskrit: Khadira

Hindi: Katha

English: Cutch tree

Khadira wood is considered sacred both by the Hindus and the Buddhists. There is a mention of the plant in the Bhagavata Purana and other ancient Indian texts. It also finds a mention in the Buddhists Jataka stories.

When Brahmadatta was king of Benares, Bodhisatta was born as a wood-pecker and since he lived in a forest of Acacia trees i.e. *Khadirj-vana,* he was called Khadiravaniya. He had a friend called Kandagulaka, who used to get his food from soft, good fruit.

Once Kandagalaka visited Khadiravaniya and the latter took him into the Acacia woods and pecked at the tree trunks until the insects came out and these he gave to his friend to eat. Kundagalaka was an arrogant bird and thought that he could himself get the insects to eat, why should he be obliged to Khadiravaniya for them. When he told his intentions to his friend, Khadiravaniya said: “You are used to take your food from pithless silk-cotton trees and trees that bear abundant soft fruit. But *Khadira* is full of pith and is hard. You should not peck at it”.

But Kandagalaka did not heed the warning given by his friend and pecked at the hard *Khadira* wood. The wood being hard, his beak snapped, his head split and he could not hold fast to the tree. He fell to the ground arid died.

Bodhisatts identified the Birth and said: “Devadutta was Kandag-abka and Khadiravaniya was myself. This was not the first time that Devadutta had destroyed himself by imitating me”.

The dried pulp extracted from the wood of *Acacia catechu* is used as a paste for the betel leaves. It has digestive and other medicinal properties. The inflorescence of *Khadira* is essential in marriage ceremonies in certain parts of India.

The sacrificial post is made of *Khadira* wood, also the sacrificial fire, as it produces very hot embers. The *Sruva* or sacrificial ladle is also made fromits^woodperhaps because the wood is very hard.

ACACIA SUMA

Family Leguminoseae

Sanskrit & Hindi: Sami
English: Acacia

In the krita age all the celestials approached Varuna and said: “As Sakra, the lord of the celestials always protects us from every fear, similarly be thou the lord of all rivers. Thou always residest, O god, in the Ocean, that home of Makaras. This Ocean, the Lord of rivers, will then be under thy dominion. Thou shalt then wax and wane with Soma.’ Thus addressed, Varuna answered: “Let it be so”.

Then according to the rites laid down in the scriptures, Varuna took his abode in the Ocean. The illustrious Varuna began to duly protect seas and lakes, rivers and other receptacles of water and all aquatic creatures. Because of Varuna haying his abode in the waters, these became a place of pilgrimage or *Tirtha.* Baladeva, the slayer of Pralamba and possessor ot great wisdom, after having bathed in the abode of Varuna i.e. the river, proceeded to the *Agni Tirtha* which was the spot where the god of fire, Agni, the eater of clarified butter, frightened at the curse of Bhrigu, had concealed himself within the entrails of the *Sami* wood. At this disappearance of the light of the world, the gods repaired to the Grandsire of the Universe and said: The odorable Agni has disappeared for reasons unknown to us. Let not all creatures be destroyed, create fire, O Lord”. Upon the disappearance of Agni, all the gods with Vasava or Vrihaspati at their head, searched for the missing god and found him in the entrails of the *Sami* wood. Having found Agni, the gods returned to their respective homes. Agni, henceforth, because of Bhrigu’s curse became an eater of everything. Balarama, after having bathed at Agni *Tirtha the* spot where Agni had entered the *Sami*

wood, then proceeded to Brahmayoni where Brahma had exercised his functions of creation.

Another story regarding the sacredness of the Sami wood is told in the *Mahabharata.* An Asura called Taraka was afflicting the deities and the Rishis. To get *him* killed, the deities and the Rishis approached Brahma. Brahma gave them his word that the vedas and the eternal duties *"will* not be exterminated and he promised to do something to get rid of Taraka. The deities then reminded Brahma that because of his boon to Taraka, Taraka was incapable of being slain by the deities, Asuras or Rakshasas. For having tried to stop propagation in earlier days, the deities had also been cursed by Uma, the consort of Siva. As a result of that curse, they could not have any offspring. Brahma told the assembled company that at the time the curse was pronounced by Uma, Agni was not present and therefore he was free from the curse. Agni would begat an offspring who, transcending all the deities, Danavas, Rakshasas, Gandharvas, Nagas and the feathery creatures will slay Taraka. Continuing, he said: "Kama is identical with Rudra's seed, a portion of which fell into the blazing form of Agni. That blazing substance will be cast by Agni into Gangs for producing an offspring upon her in order to effect the destruction of the enemies of the gods. Let the eater of sacrificial libations, who alone is Capable of killing Taraka, being free of Uma's curse, be sought. Agni is the Lord of the universe. Will or desire is identified with Agni".

The deities and the Rishis then searched for Agni in all corners of the three worlds but could not find him as Agni had merged himself into self i.e. water, for water is identified with Agni. Agni having entered the waters, the aquatic animals were scorched by the heat thus produced. A frog living in the water could not bear the heat anymore. As the deities were searching for Agni, the frog came above the water surface and informed them of Agni's whereabouts. When Agni came to know of frog's treachery, he cursed him by depriving "is entire race of their organs of taste. Seeing the plight to which the frogs were reduced for having done them a service, the deities showed them a favour and said that inspire of all the inconveniences caused to them by the lack of tongues, the Earth would still hold them and they will no: starve. After bestowing this boon on the frogs, the deities went about searching for Agni but failed to find him. An elephant told them that Agni was hiding in the *Aswattha* tree (Ficus digiosa). Incensed by the betrayal of the elephants, Agni cursed them and said that their tongues would be bent backwards. The deities then said to the elephants that even with tongues bent inwards, they would be able to eat and make incoherent sounds. Having thus

blessed the elephants, the deities resumed their search for Agni. Having issued out of the *Aswattha,* the deity of fire had entered the heart of Sami tree. His new abode was divulged by a parrot. Enraged with the conduct of the parrot, Agni cursed the whole parrot race and deprived them of the power of speech. The deities feeling compassion for the parrot blessed them and said that though their tongues had been turned back, they will still have speech, sweet and indistinct and confined to the letter K. Then beholding the deity of fire within the heart of the *Sami* wood, the deities made *Sami* a sacred fuel fit for producing fire in all religious rites. From that time onwards, Agni is believed to reside in the heart of 5am; and men came to regard Sam; as the right wood for producing fire in sacrifices and to this day, the sacrificial fire is produced by rubbing together two sticks of *Sami* wood. (See Aswattha).

In ancient times, Kings sometimes performed sacrifices causing altars' to be raised at small distances from one another. Those distances were measured by hurling a heavy piece of *Sami* wood from an altar. The site for the next altar was chosen at the spot the piece of *Sami* had fallen.

Since the time that Agni devatta concealed himself in the Sami wood, the tree became sacred. Sami is a Very inflammable wood and is therefore, used in all .sacred rites where the holy fire *Homa* is kindled. *Sami is* also considered as the goddess-incarnate. Since *Sami* has fire inside it and Kudra is an embodiment of fire, Siva or Rudra is conceived as a yupa post made of *Sami* wood.

An evil spirit resides in it but he works evil only if a bed is made or repaired from Acacia wood. Such a bed can not be slept in.

AEGLE MARMELOS

Family Rutacese

Sanskrit: Bilva, Vilva

Hindi : Bel, Bael

English: Wood Apple

Bilva is a scraggy tree with three leaves and with a crust of thick thorns. The three leaves together, look like Trishul, or the Trident, the emblem of Siva. These tri-foliate leaves signify the three functions of Siva i.e. Creation, Preservation and Destruction. They also represent his three eyes. That is why *Bilva* leaves are considered effective in removing the sins of three births. The tree is sacred to Siva and is worshipped by his followers on

the 14th phase of the moon's wane between the months of Magha (Feb.) and Phalguna (March). 27th of February is the greatest Sivaratri day in the year. On this day is celebrated Siva's first manifestation of himself in phallic form. The Linga is bathed in milk, decorated and wrapped with *Bilva* leaves.

Bilva is considered as one of the important sacred trees and keeps on recurring in Hindu Mythology. The following story is from Brihaddharma Purana as quoted by Gupta in his article on Tree symbol worship in Bengal'. Lakshmi, while worshipping Siva used to make a daily offering of one thousand lotus buds. One day when she was going to worship Siva, she found that the lotus flowers were short by two. She was in a quandry as to what to do when she remembered that her husband, Vishnu had always compared her breasts to lotus buds. So she decided to cut off her breasts, and substitute them in place of the lotus flowers that were missing. As she cut off one breast, Siva satisfied with her worship of him and at her sacrifice appeared before her and said that her cut breast (which was not placed on the ground and therefore did not become unclean) would be the wood apple i.e. the *Bilva* tree.

According to Banihipurana and Tantrik folklore, Lakshmi was born as a sacred cow and from her dung arose the *Bilva* tree and therefore it is considered sacred. The tree being associated with lakshmi, it is also called *Sribiksha,* the tree of prosperity and good fortune.

Another legend says that Lakshmi and Saraswati were both wives of Vishnu but Vishnu loved Saraswati more than he loved Lakshmi. Enraged, Lakshmi started the worship of Siva and was engaged in meditation of Siva for a very long time but Siva did not appear before her. After a while, Lakshmi became the *Bilva* tree and now Siva dwells in the tree.

According to one legend, a hunter was trying to shoot a deer. He climbed the *Bilva* tree and getting bored in his hours of waiting, to kill time he started plucking the leaves of the tree and throwing them down. Under the tree was an image of Siva. After a while, Siva himself appeared to the hunter in a vision and said, "I make myself visible to you for it is not the way you worship that is important but the worship itself. Even the accidental fall of leaves on the image of Siva, gave the hunter his vision. From that day onwards, the tree and its trifoliate arrangement of leaves became sacred. Another version of the same story is given by Dubois.

A slightly different version of the story is: Sundara Sena, the vicious king of Arunda went out hunting. Getting tired he took rest in a bower of *Bilva* trees. There was a phallic emblem in the bower and *Bilva* leaves fell on it

because the king plucked them from the tree. Plucking *Bilva* leaves made the dust rise and to lay down the dust, the king brought water from the near by river and sprinkled it on the tree. Some water dribbled down on the head of the emblem. Then a shaft fell down from the king's quiver and he went to fetch it. As he bent down to pick it up, his chest touched the emblem. Having touched, bathed and worshipped the emblem of Siva with *Bilva* leaves on the night of the Vratam, the king got his vision of Mahadeva.

Another interesting legend is as follows: Once in the city of Pataliputra ruled a king called Vikramatunga. He had the reputation of never turning his back on a suppliant, nor in fighting on an enemy. The king one day entered a forest to hunt and saw a Brahman offering a sacrifice of *Bilva* fruits. The king did not disturb him and went ahead with his chase. Hours later, on his return from the chase; he found the Brahman still intent on his sacrifice as before. The king got curious and going upto the Brahman asked him what merit he was going to gain by offering *Bilva* fruits.

The Brahman named Nagasarman answered, "When the God of Fire is pleased with this *Bilva* for sacrifice, and then *Bilva* fruits of gold will come out of the fire. The God of Fire will appear in bodily form and grant me a boon; and so I have spent much time in offering *Bilva* fruits. But so little is my merit that even now the God of Fire is not propitiated".

The king then said, "Give me a *Bilva* fruit that I may offer it, and I will today, O Brahman, and render the God of Fire propitious to you".

The Brahman answered, "How will you, unchastened and impure, propitiate that God of Fire, who is not satisfied with me, who remain faithful to my vow and am chastened"?

The king answered, "Never mind, give me a *Bilva* fruit and in a moment you shall behold a wonder".

The Brahman, full of wonder and curiosity, gave a *Bilva* fruit to the king. The king meditated for a while and offering the *Bilva* fruit to the fire, said, "If thou art not satisfied with this *Bilva* fruit, O God of Fire, then I will offer thee my own head".

Arising from the sacrificial fire, the seven-rayed god appeared before the king, bringing him a golden *Bilva* fruit, as the fruit of his valour and addressing the king said, "I am pleased with thy courage, so receive a boon, O king".

The king bowed before the God of Fire and said, "Grant this Brahman his wish. What other boon do I require".

The God of Fire answered, “O king, this Brahman shall become a great lord of wealth and thou shall also by my favour have the prosperity of thy treasury remain ever undiminished”.

The Brahman then addressed the God of Fire and said, Thou hast appeared swiftly to a king that acts according to his own will, but not to me that am under vows, why is this, O revered one?”

Then the God of Fire, the giver of boons answered, “If I had not granted him an interview, this king of fierce courage would have offered his head in sacrifice to me. In this world successes quickly befall those of fierce spirit, but they come slowly, O Brahman, to those of dull spirit like thee”. Thus spoke the God of Fire and vanished. The Brahman Nagasarman took leave of the king and because of the boon given him by the God of Fire, became very rich.

According to certain tribes of India, the tree sprang from the testes of a pig which is considered an unclean animal, thus revealing the great gap that exists between the orthodox Hindu thought and that of the tribes. Naturally therefore, most tribal people do not consider the pig sacred. The Gauria snake-charmers of Central India are believed to cure snake bites by an appeal to the *Bilva* tree and to Dhanwantri, the Physician of gods.

Before the start of the war between Ramachandra and Ravana, Brahma took Rama to a *Bilva* tree on the sea shore to invoke Devi on the *Krsna navami Tithi.* Rama approached the *Bilva* tree and eugolised Devi and the latter assured him with a voice from heaven that he would attain victory over the Rakshasas.

A fallen tree is never used for firewood and though its fruit is highly valued by people, the people of Kerala never eat it, as it signifies the head of Siva. *Bilva* leaves are offered to Siva on Mondays in the month of Shrawan (July). Its wood is included in *Homa* and the fruit is believed to promote fertility.

Bilva tree is highly medicinal, particularly useful in curing diseases of the skin by purifying the blood. The fruit, believed to have come from the milk of Sri, is a remedy for dysentery. The tree is planted on the north side of the house.

ANTHOCEPHALLUS CADAMBA

Family Rubiaceae

Sanskrit: Kadamba

Hindi: Kadam

English: Kadamb

This is the famous *Kadamba* tree popularly associated with Krsna. Krsna dancing with Radha and his favourite gopies under this tree is a favourite theme of the Krsna-Radha legend and is often represented in miniature paintings. Till'today, the tree is held sacred by the followers of Krsna and in memory of his swinging from its branches and delighting with the milkmaids of Brndavana; its flowers are offered at the temples dedicated to him.

According to a *Puranic* legend, the distillation of liquor is associated with the *Kadamba* tree. Sheshnag, the great serpent who supports the earth, was on his wanderings in the forest with his companions in the guise of a mortal. Lord Varuna wanted to provide him with recreation and ordered his wife Varuni, the goddess of wine to go and regale the powerful Ananta or Sheshnag and make him happy. Obeying the commands of her husband, Varuni as Madira or wine, went and hid herself in the hollow of a *Kadamba* tree in the, Brndavana. Krsna, as Baladeva who was roaming in the forest, smelled the pleasant fragrance of liquor and his old passion for strong drink was resumed. Seeing drops of liquor come from the *Kadamba* tree, he was delighted and gathering them, drunk it with his herdsmen and the gopies, the latter then sang and danced praising Krsna. Krsna got drunk with wine and in his drunken state called upon the river Jamuna to come near him as he wished to bathe. The river disregarded the wishes of a man who was drunk, at which Krsna got enraged at the audacity of Jamuna and plunged his ploughshare into the river and dragged her to him and further compelled the river to follow him wherever he went in his wanderings in the forest Since that day Krsna and the *Kadamba* tree which provided him with liquor have come to be associated together.

Assuming a mortal figure, Jamuna with distracted looks approached Balabhadra, another aspect of Krsna and entreated him to pardon her. Appeased by her reiterated prayers, Krsna let her go but only after she had watered the whole country. Then Balarama bathed in the river Jamuna and Lakshmi, the goddess of beauty gave him a lotus flower to put in his car and a garland of lotus flowers to wear.

In the *Vishnu Purana* there is a mention of the four sacred mountains: Mandara, Gandhamandara, Vipula and Supars.a and on each one of them stands severally a *Kadamba* tree, a *jambu* tree (Syzgium cumini, syn. Eugenia jambolena), a *Peepul* (Ficus religiosa) and a *Vata* (Ficus

bengalensis) tree, each spreading over 1100 yojanas and towering aloft like banners. In the *Bhagavata Purana,* Mango tree is present on mount Mandara; *Jambu* tree on Merumandara; *Vata* on the Kamuda and *Kadamba* on mount Suparsva. Though the *Kadamba* tree is associated with the exudation of liquor drops, in fact wine does not exude from the *Kadamba* tree but its flowers are said to yield a spirit on distillation. The name Kadambari is a synonym of wine. The original *Kadamba* tree is believed to have grown on the Gomantha Mountain, one of the mythical sacred mountains of Hindu Mythology.

Gohitayani, the nurse of Skanda, is worshipped under a *Kadamba* tree.

ARUNDO DONAX

Family Gramineae

Sanskrit: Nalaka

Hindi : Bari-nari

English: Cane-sticks, Great Reed, Spanish Cane

Buddha, the Master, while on an alms pilgrimage with his disciples through Kosala came to the village of Nalaka-pana. They were dwelling in the *Ketaka-vana* (Pandanus odoratissimus) near the pool of Nalaka-pana where grew the cane-sticks. The cane sticks those days were solid and the novices used to gather them to make needle cases out of them. Seeing the forest of *Nalaka-pana,* Buddha narrated the following story, an event which had occured in a previous birth.

Once Bodhisatta was born as the king of the monkeys and lived in the forest near this pool with his 80,000 followers. One day the monkeys came to a spot that they had not visited before. They were thirsty but instead of drinking the water of the lake, they waited for Bodhisatta, their king to come. Bodhisatta, on arrival made a circuit of the lake and scrutinized the foot prints round it and noticed that footsteps led down into the water but none came out of it. He then realised that the lake was the haunt of an Ogre and was glad that none of his followers had gone down to the lake to drink water,

When the Ogre realised that the monkeys were not coming down to the lake he came but of the water and finding *ail* of them sitting on the banks of the lake, addressed their Master and asked him why the monkeys were not going down to the lake to drink water. Bodhisatta, the Master, asked him in return if he was the Ogre who] ate up the animals that went to drink water at

the lake. The Ogre replied in the affirmative and also disclosed his intentions of eating all the monkeys when they went to the lake. The Bodhisatta told him that the monkeys would drink the water of the lake but without going down to it, and that the Ogre would not be able to eat them. The Bodhisatta had a cane brought-to him and after calling to mind the Ten Perfections, he recited them and blew down the cane. The cane became hollow without a single knot being left in all its length. He then made a round of the lake and commanded all canes to become hollow. After the canes became hollow, he and the 80,000 monkeys each took a hollow cane in their hands and sucked the water up through them and the Ogre could not catch them.

The Ogre in the story was Devadutta; the 80,000 monkeys were the disciples of Buddha and the monkey king was Bodhisatta himself.

The cane-sticks are tall, stout, perennial grasses with a hollow stem. They are common all over India and are distributed westwards to Europe, N.Africa and N.Asia.

ASCLEPIA AECIDUM

Family Asclepiadaceae

Sanskrit: Soma

Hindi: Somalata

English: Sour creeper

Soma is variously described as a God, as a drink and as a plant. As a drink it is considered to be a drought of immortality, soma, which also has great, curative powers. As a deity, he is considered to be a wise seer who inspires good thoughts and poetry, Soma is also considered as Vanaspati, the lord of plants and woods. In a few hymns in the Rg-veda, he is identified with the moon. The ninth chapter of the Rg-veda is devoted to the Soma deity. *Soma* plant which grew on the hills, corresponds to Haoma of Avesta and like the fire-cult, the soma-cult is also identical to the Iranian custom where Soma, under the name of Haoma, plays exactly the same role in the worship and sacrifice of the followers of Avesta.

In the Rg-veda, the Soma deity is referred as a plant which yields intoxicating beverages. This liquor *is* offered at sacrifices, partaken by the worshipper and poured into the sacred flame on the altar of sacrifice. The Soma draught is said to dispel sin from the heart, to destroy falsehood and to promote truth. The ninth chapter of the Gita mentions Soma as: Those who

are devoted to the three wisdoms i.e. Dharam, Arath, Kama, drink Soma, become similar and pray for paradise.

According to the Rg-veda, Soma deity which is mountain born, comes after Agni and Indra in importance. It is said that Varuna who placed the Sun in the heaven and fire in the water, placed Soma on the mountains. Like fire, Soma is brought to men by superhuman agency. Whereas Fire was brought to earth from Heaven by Matarishvan, Soma was brought from the mountains by a falcon. The original *Soma* plant grew in the Heavens.

Parallels were recognised between the celestial and the earthly spheres.

Soma, King moon; dwells in the *Soma* plant, the stalks of which yield an intoxicating drink. This drink was considered as the terrestrial counterpart of the elixir of immortality, the amrta which was contained in the cup of the moon and, the gods imbibed it on mount Sumeru. To attract Indra and other gods to the diurnal rituals of the Vedic times, counterpart of the amrta i.e. the juice of a terrestrial plant was offered at sacrifices.

The plant associated with the soma-cult grew on the Himalayan highlands of Kashmir, in the deep valleys of which the Aryan tribes dwelt from very early times probably even before the Rg-veda hymns were compiled and the complicated priestly ritual with regard to their use was rigidly instituted. The cult of the Soma sacrifice started in the north mountainous region from where it spread geographically south eastwards with the spread of the race. But since very likely the *Soma* plant did not flourish well in these hotter regions, immense quantities of the plant needed for consumption of the increasing Aryan settlements had to be got from the mountains, which practice being highly inconvenient because of the distance involved, the real *Soma* plant was ultimately substituted by another plant which also yielded an intoxicating beverage, a plant which answered at least to a partial morphological description of the original *Soma* plant. This plant is *Sarcostemma acidum* known as *Soma* or *Somalata* in Hindi. This plant also belongs to the family Asclepiadaceae.

According to some historians, there were five plants from which the juice was extracted. According to others, the *Soma* plant was *Ephednt pachyclade* (Hindi: Hum, Huma) or *Ephedra distachya* which grows from Siberia to the North Himalayan region. This theory is plausiole if we accept the Arctic home for the vedas." The other two plants associated with it are *Asclepia acida* and *Sarcostemma viminale* or *Sarcostemma aqjdum* (English: Moon plant) both belonging to the family Asclepiadaceae. The description of the *Soma* plant is: "with hanging bough, bare of leaves and of a light brown

colour; knotty joints containing an abundance of slightly astringent, milky juice in a fibrous cane like outer rind."

Adara is a plant prescribed as a substitute for Soma. It is identified in the Satapatha Brahrnana as *Putika* (Guilandina Bonduc or Baselfa cordifolia)."

For the extraction of the juice a regular trade started between certain mountain tribes who used to gather the plant and sell it to the Aryans. The Aryans considered the tribes contemptible for trading in a divine plant and did not allow them to-either extract the *Soma-rus* or to partake of it. The price the Aryans paid to these mountain tribes for the plant was a reddish-brown cow with light brown eyes, in allusion perhaps to the colour of the *Soma* plant. This cow was not allowed to be roughly handled.

The juice was pressed out of the plant with various attendant rituals. It was then mixed with other ingredients and fermented to make the intoxicating sacrificial beverage which was the holiest offering in ancient Indian worship. There were rituals attendant at every step of the *Soma-rus* extraction. The plant had to be collected by uprooting it during moonlight and carried to the sacrificial altar on a carriage drawn by two goats. The altar or the *vedi* was prepared from *Kusa ghas* (Eragrostis cynasuroides), where the gods ultimately came and took their seat. The *Soma* plant was laid on the consecrated spot before being pressed. *Pravargya* was a special preliminary *rite* performed in the sacrifice. *Abhishava* was the extraction of the juice of the *Soma* plant and its consecration with *mantras.* The vessels were made of the Aswattha (Ficus religiosa) wood.

This unadulterated clear, shining juice was called Sukra, Suchi or Suddaha. The filtered juice was then put into jars i.e. *Kalasa* or vats called *drona.* In the jars the juice was mixed with milk or water to sweeten it

The *Soma* admixture called asir was of three different kinds. Mixed with milk it was called *Go,* with sour milk *dadhi* and with barley, *yava.* This admixture was referred as a bright robe.

Soma-rus was pressed three times a day i.e. morning, mid-day and evening. The first two extractions were offered to Indra and the one pressed in the evening was meant for the Ribbus. *Soma-rus* was drunk by the gods at the ceremonial offering made to them by the priests. The drink nourished them and threw them into a joyous intoxication. The divine beverage was supposed to purify the drinker, give health and immortality and pave the entry of the drinker to heaven and destroy his enemies. The drink produced enthusiastic and exhilarating; effect and a consciousness of something divine. The drink was considered as the earthly form of the celestial *soms.*

Symbolically, the stones on which the plants were pressed were the clouds; the stones used for pressing the plants were the thunderbolts; the sieve was the sky; the liquor that fell through the sieve was the rain and the *kalasa* or vessel holding the juice was the *Samundra,* the celestial sea that holds all the atmospheric waters.

According to the Upanishads the moon is King Soma. He is also known as a warrior god when he is depicted as vigorous and well armed, equipped to battle against the demons who abide Jn the dark. Soma deity is also considered as the Lord of streams and the admixture of the juice has a special relation with the waters. According to one myth, Soma is married to Surya, the Sun maiden. According to another story, he is the son of Rishi Atri and Anasuya and married twentyseven daughters of Daksha who are personified as twentyseven lunar asterisms.

The inspiring effect of intoxication seemed to be due to the inherent divinity of the plant that produced it, the plant was, therefore, regarded as divine and the preparation of the draught was looked upon as a sacred ceremony.

According to Mackenzie, "Soma worship appears to be connected with the belief that life was in the blood; literally 'the life blood'... the blood of trees was the name for the sap; sap was water impregnated or vitalised by Soma, the essence of life. Water worship and Soma worship were probably identical, the moon which was believed to be the source of growth and moisture, being the fountain head of 'the water of life'."

BUTEA MONOSPERMA

Family Papillionaceae

Sanskrit: Kimshuka, Plaksha

Hindi: Palas, Dhak, Teysu

English: Flame of the forest, Parrot tree, Judas tree

The tree is considered sacred by both the Hindus and the Buddhists. The Hindus consider it sacred because of the tri-foliate formation of its leaves which represents the Holy trinity with Vishnu, the Preserver in the middle, Brahma, the Creator on the left and Siva, the Destroyer on the right.

The tree is associated with moon as it is believed to have sprung from the feather of a falcon imbued with Soma, the intoxicating drink of the gods and is thus immortalised.

It is a common practice to use the leaves of the tree in ceremonies connected with the blessing of the calves to ensure their becoming good milkers. Dry twigs of the plant are used in the sacred fire *Homa.* Its wood is sacrificial and is mentioned in the vedas. From the wood are made utensils used for sacred purposes. The staff placed in the hands of a Brahmin boy at the time of the thread ceremony is made from the *Plaksha* wood. When a Brahmin boy renounces the worldly life and becomes a *sadhu* and his hair are being shorn, he is given the *Plaksha* leaf to eat or else he must eat off *Plaksha* leaves.

The orange red flowers of the tree are offered to the gods, especially to goddess Kali. In the spring festival of *Holi,* a dye made from the flowers is used to sprinkle the passers by. Since *Holi* is associated with Krsna, the tree has come to be associated with him. Red being the colour of passion, a young man smearing the face of a maiden with the dye made from the flowers of *Plaksha* is supposed to have great erotic significance. Amir Khusru, a Turkoman poet, compares the flowers of the tree to a lion's claw stained with blood. In Indian poetry the flowers are compared to the new nail marks on the body of the beloved. A Rg-vedic hymn describes the bridal car as adorned with its blossoms (Su-Kimsuka). *Palasa patram* or a vessel of Palasa wood was used by the trees for milking the cow earth. Its wood is used in ceremonies connected with *Krsnastamivratam* and the digging of tanks.

The *Plaksha* tree is associated with Brahma also because of the following legend. Once Siva and Parvati were engaged in amorous dalliance. The gods and deities ordered Agni devatta to go there in the guise of a Brahmana. Seeing Agni intrude on their privacy, Parvati cursed the whole host of gods and deities to be born as trees. Because of the curse, Brahma was converted into the *Plaksha* tree, Vishnu into the *Aswattha* (Ficus religiosa), and Rudra into the *Vata* (Ficus indica syn. F. bengalensis.) tree.

Buddhists associate the tree in flower to penitents dressed in orange red. Orange red being the colour of flame, it is worn symbolically by those who have burnt all their desires. The tree often figures in Buddhist Jataka stories. One of the stories relate: King Brahmadatta of Benares had four sons. Once they sent for their charioteer and expressed a desire to see the *Kimshuka* tree. The charioteer, instead of taking the four sons of the king together to see the *Kimshuka* tree, showed them the tree separately and at different times of the season. One son saw the tree when buds were sprouting from the stem; the second when the leaves were green; the third when the tree was in blossom and the fourth when the tree was bearing fruit.

After they had all seen the tree, they were asked by someone about what sort of a tree *Kimshuka* was. The four brothers having seen the tree at different seasons* their impressions about the tree naturally differed from one another. The elder brother having seen the tree when buds, were sprouting from it said that it looked like a burnt stump. The tree bears flowers buds when it is bereft of all foliage and the stems are completely bare. The second brother's impressions were that it looked like a banyan tree as he had seen the tree decked in green foliage. The green, coarse, ovoid shaped leaves resemble the leaves of a banyan tree. The third brother thought that the tree resembled a piece of meat as he had seen the tree full of flowers. The flowers of *Kimshuka* are orange-red in colour. The fourth compared the tree to an Acacia tree as it was in fruit when he had seen it. Both *Kimshuka* and Acacia bear similar looking pods as fruit.

The brother's were perplexed at each other's answer and went to their father the king, for an explanation. The king answered, "All of you have seen the tree at a different season but none of you asked the charioteer what the tree looked like in a different season and so you are in a doubt".

Similarly, four brothers had approached the Tathagata and asked for means by which ecstasy could be induced. Tathagata explained the various ways of attaining ecstasy. One of them learnt the Six Spheres of Touch and became a saint; second by learning the Five Elements of Being; third after learning the Four Principal Elements; fourth after learning the Eighteen Constituents of Being. One of the brothers was in a doubt and said, "There is only one Nirvana for all these modes of meditation; how is it that all of them lead to sainthood?"

Tathagata was born as king Brahmadatta of Benares. He had the four sons who saw the *Kimshuka* tree at different times of the year. These were the same four brothers who in a previous birth had asked the Tathagata about the ways of attaining Nirvana. During the reign of Brahmadatta of Benares, Bodhisatta was born in the form of a *Kimsuka* tree spirit.

This is a medicinal plant. Its gum is used as an external astringent. Bark of the tree is locally used by certain tribes for snake and scorpion bites but medicinally it has proved to be useless.

COCCULUS CORDIFOLIUS

Family Menispcrmaceae

Hindi & Sanskrit: Gaduchi
English: Rain of Nectar

The plant is considered sacred because of a legend in the *Ramayana.* The demon king Ravana was enamoured of the beauty of Sita, the wife of Ramachandra and wished to make her his wife. Also, by doing so he hoped to avenge his sister Surupnakha whose nose had been chopped off by Lakshmana, the younger brother of Ramachandra. He played a ruse on them and removed Ramachandra and Lakshmana by his magical prowess from the cottage where Sita lived with her husband and brother-in-law, by appearing as a golden deer which Sita desired to possess. To catch the deer, the two brothers chased it to a great distance. In their absence Ravana appeared before Sita in the guise of a mendicant and asked for alms. Sita believing him to be a pious ascetic came out of the cottage to give him alms. Left undefended she was taken by force by Ravana to his kingdom of Lanka. A great battle ensued following Sita's abduction. To rescue her, Ramachandra with his army of monkeys attacked Lanka and killed Ravana. Sita was at last rescued. Indra, the king of gods was happy at the fall of Ravana and at the removal of evil. He brought back to life all the *vaanars* i.e. monkeys killed in the battle by spraying the elixir of life on them. Some of the nectar fell on the earth and wherever the drops of the nectar fell, plants of *Gaduchi* sprang up and because of their origin from the nectar, they were immortalised and therefore, are held sacred.

Gaduchi is a medicinal plant, yielding a bitter medicine given to children for various ailments.

COCOS NUCIFERA

Family Palmae

Sanskrit: Narikel

Hindi: Nariel

English: Coconut palm

Unripe coconut fruit is an essential part of all Hindu religious ceremonies. Even in areas where the coconut palm does not grow, no *puja* or offering is complete till a coconut is offered. If a son, a brother or a husband is going on a long journey, the mother, the sister or the wife applies *tilak* on his forehead, wishing him well and offers him a coconut. In South Indian temples, the priests will not accept the offerings of a devotee, if it does not contain a coconut Similarly at weddings and other auspicious occasions a coconut is placed at the *pandal* erected far the ceremony.. Because of the economic utility of coconut, which perhaps makes it essential in all sacred ceremonies, the fruit is also called *Sriphala.*

Usually a pitcher of water is placed on white paddy; a branch of mango is placed in the pitcher and a coconut adorned with sandal paste, vermilion and flowers is placed on that branch. This is called the full pitcher *Purnakumbha* which is symbolically invoked as gods and goddesses for the successful end to any mission undertaken.

As often happens with customs the world over, the meaning behind a ritual is lost but the symbol is retained. So it is with the offering of the coconut fruit. Long, long ago, human sacrifice used to take place in India to propitiate the deity, particularly at the temple of Bhadra-Kali. But as time passed and people got enlightened, human sacrifice gave place £o animal sacrifice and ultimately to the symbolic offering of a coconut which with its round and fibrous outer covering, the epicarp, resembles a human head and the two dark spots on it represent the two human eyes. This is the closest resemblance of any member of the vegetable kingdom to a human head. For this reason it is offered as a symbolic human sacrifice.

The legend connected .with its origin says that Rishi Viswamitra practised severe austerities for a long time and in the end acquired super-human powers. To prove his prowess, he decided to send king Tri-sanku to heaven in his earthly mortal body. King Tri-sanku had been exiled from his kingdom by his father for the seduction of the wife of a citizen. During the period of exile, there was a severe famine and Tri-sanku looked after the wife and children of Viswamitra while the latter was away. Since Tri-sanku desired to reach heaven in his mortal body, Viswamitra repayed him for looking after his family, by fulfilling his desire and raised him to heaven in his mortal body inspite of strong opposition from sages and gods. But when king Tri-sanku reached Indra's *swarag* in his mortal body, Indra was furious, "How can a mortal reside in my domain in his mortal body? Only souls are permitted". Feeling annoyed at the audacity of Rushi Viswamitra, he hurled the body of the king out of the heavens. When Sage Viswamitra saw this happen, he was indignant. His very first effort was coming to naught. For the king's body to come back to earth would not only have meant insult but also an acceptance of defeat at the hands of Indra. So Viswamitra used his magical powers again and stopped the king from falling on the ground. This resulted in king Tri-sanku being suspended in the air. To prop him, Viswamitra put a pole under him. In course of time, the pole became the coconut palm which is as straight and unbranched as the pole which Sage Viswamitra had taken to stop the further fall of the king. The reason for the coconut fruit to have coarse fibrous outer covering is because symbolically it

resembles the hair of the king and the two prominent black spots on the outside of the fruit resemble the two eyes of the king.

Coconut fruit is believed to fulfil one's desires. It is therefore considered sacred and offered to gods. The fruit is considered a symbol of Siva as it has three black spots and Siva is believed to have three eyes. In Gujerat the bride offers a coconut to the bridegroom and this coconut is preserved by him throughout his life. In Mysore it is worshipped as a family god. Coconut is also worshipped as Saraswati, the goddess of learning.

DIOSPYROS MELANOXYLON, D. PEREGRINA

Family Ebenaceae

Sanskrit: Tinduka

Hindi: Tendu

English: Ebony tree

According to Oriyan tribal tales as related by Verrier Elwin the origin of the tree goes back into antiquity, when Kittung and his wife had to escape the great deluge in a gourd. On reaching safety, they emerged from the gourd which naturally broke in the process and they made a fire from its fragments. From its charred wood arose the ebony tree which is, therefore, black.

According to another story, a girl had died from snake bite. This tree arose from her grave and since snake bite turns the victim blue-black because of the poison, the tree that arose from her grave is also black.

Among certain tribes of India, a pole made of the ebony tree is usually used to protect fields of tobacco and chillies from a sorceror, from a belief that the sorceror would be attracted by the pole. But since the pole is black, the whole field will appear black to the sorceror and thus made invisible, would be protected from harm.

According to yet another tribal story the reason for the wood of *Tinduka* being black goes back to Ramayana. Before the battle of Lanka took place to rescue Sita, (see Cocculus cordifolius) Hanuman, the monkey god was sent by Ramachandra to survey the formidable city of Lanka. Hanuman, the son of *Vayu* or wind, tied a piece of cloth soaked in oil to his tail and lighted it. Then he jumped from house top to house top, putting the city to flames. After he had jumped back to safety, he wiped his blackened hands upon the Ebony tree and since then its wood is black.

According to a Muria tribal story which is very similar to the above story, when Lingo's virtue was tested by the ordeal of fire, a *Tinsa* (Ongenia dalbergioides) tree grew out of the fire. Lingo's foot struck the *Tinsa* tree and the bark has ever since looked dead and dry on one side. The white ashes from his body flew over the *Saja* (Terminalia comentosa) tree and it became white and holy. Lingo becoming holy on passing the test, rubbed his blackened body against the ebony tree and ever since its wood has been black.

Tinduka fruit is considered sacred by the Buddhists as it figures in one of the Jataka stories, the stories of Buddha's former births. It is a shade bearing tree and therefore much valued in India.

When Brahmadatta was king of Benares, Bodhisatta was born as a monkey. He, along with 80.000 other monkeys lived near a village in the Himalayas. In the village was a tree of *Tinduka* which in season was loaded with sweet fruit. This village was inhabited for only a part of the year and the monkeys used to come down from the hills to eat the fruit.

Once, when the tree was loaded with fruit, the village was full of people but even then the monkeys decided to risk and invade the village. When they informed their master about their intentions, he warned them against it as men were very deceitful. But the monkeys, since they were hungry for the taste of the delicious fruit said, "We'll go at mid-night when everyone is fast asleep. The great host of the monkeys came down from the mountains and waited in the vicinity of the village till people went off to sleep. When the village was all quiet, the monkeys invaded the *Tinduka* tree and started eating the fruit. But as ill-luck would have it, one man woke up and gave the alarm. The villagers woke up and came running with what ever weapons they could lay their hands on and surrounded the tree to kill the monkeys. The monkeys got scared and looked at their chief for help. He assured them that all will be well and asked the monkeys to assemble together. When the 80,000 monkeys had gathered together, they found that Sanaka, the nephew of the Master was missing. He had fallen asleep when the monkey troop had left for the village. On waking up, he followed the track of the other monkeys and when he neared the village, he found people running about, shouting and brandishing sticks and he realised that there was some danger to the monkeys. Just then he saw a hut outside the village where an old woman was fast asleep before a lighted fire. Taking the fire, Senaka set the village on fire. Seeing the village on fire, the villagers left the monkeys and the *Tinduka* tree and started extinguishing the village fire. The monkeys left alone, ran away, each carrying a fruit of *Tinduka* for Senaka.

In this story, the Chief of the monkeys was Bodhisatta; his nephew Senaka was Mahanama Sakka and the monkey troop were the followers of Buddha,

Brands of *Tinduka* wood are kept in the lying-in chamber as it is believed to keep the evil spirits away and bring luck.

ELAEOCARPUS GANITRUS

Family Elaeocaipaceae

Sanskrit: Rudrakasha

Hindi: Rudrakasha

English: Utrasum Bead Tree

It is told that Parvati, the daughter of Daksha, on getting married to Siva, the Lord of death, destruction and creation, discovered' that he was oblivious to all feminine charm and indifferent to a women's desire to wear ornaments. He lived like a beggar or a *sadhu* practising austerities all the time. Parvati had practised severe austerities and penances to win Siva as .her husband and now that she was married to him, she, like all women wanted to adorn herself in jewellery and took attractive. But to Siva these were unnecessary adornments. He did not see the worth of such earthly enjoyments, considering them superfluous and childish. The time he did not spend in practising austerities, he spent in a *samadhi,* which usually lasted for years on end ... a time when he was oblivious even to the presence of his wife Parvati. Or else he gave her long discourses on learned topics which to the feminine mind of Parvati sounded too philosophical. A woman's natural desire to look attractive and to adorn herself with jewellery was frustrated by Siva, year after year.

The Himalayan peaks which are the abode of Siva are blanketed with snow for the greater part of the year. One year, when after an unusually prolonged winter, spring came, the chirping of birds could be heard from dawn to dusk; flowers opened in their myriad hues and garbs; the sky once again turned a heavenly blue; the bees and the butterflies skipped from flower to flower sucking their nectar and joy at the advent of spring was felt in every corner of the earth. Parvati also was filled with longing for love and beauty and wanted jewels to make herself look attractive. She went to Siva and told him of her longing to wear jewels,—a desire he considered a mere frivolity on her part But Parvati was adamant. In the end Siva gave in to her desire and promised to give her jewels. He stretched his hands and

Rudrakssha fruits fell from heaven into his hands by the dozen. He gave them to Parvati and asked her to make necklaces, bangles, armlets and ear-rings of the *Rudraksha* beads, saying that for the wife of an ascetic, they made the best jewellery, Parvati strung them and wore them as jewellery as directed by Siva.

According to the Skanda Purana (Chap. XI), *Rudrakasha* tree originated from Siva's tears.'

There is a general belief 4n India that *Rudrakasha* beads dispel the evil eye and if kept in the house, they avert misfortune. Also there is a strong belief that they cure cardiac ailments and are often worn by people who suffer from high blood pressure. Because of their association with Siva, *Rudrakasha* beads art considered sacred by the followers of Siva, Rudra being one of the names of Siva.

Garuda Purana mentions that 'for the sandhya adoration, sitting on *Kusa ghas,* man should have a garland of beads made of either crystal, lotus, *Rudraksha orPutranjiva* beads.'

According to the *Agni Puranam the* God himself out layed the method and types of *Rudrakasha* beads to be worn. A man should wear *Rudrakasha* beads, firmly threaded together and even in number. The seeds should have a single mouth, or 3 or 5 mouths. Seeds having 2, 4, 6 mouths with unbroken thorns on th clean, as if he has fulfilled that vow. The class of *Rudrakasha* known as Haimis, sho e surface, not having been eaten by worms or marked by any fissure are considered as the most auspicious. A four-mouthed seed should be worn by a person, either on his right arm, or tied to the tuft of hair on his crown. By doing so, the wearer, even if-not observing the vows of ascetism, will acquire the merit of leading such a pious life, or a man not observing the vow of religious ablutions, will be uld be worn by consecrating them with the Siva mantra.

The *Rudrakasha* seeds are divided into four classes or Gochares: Siva, Shikha, Yoti & Savitra. Gochara means a class of *Rudrakasha,* a hundred thousand counting of which with a mantra, grants success in life.

Rudrakasha known as Prayapatyas, Mahipalas, Kapotas, Granthikas belong to the class Siva.

Rudrakashas known as Kutilas, Vetalas, Padmahansas, belong to the class Shikha and those known as Dhritarastras, Vakas, Kakas, Gopalas to the class Yoti, while those known as the Kutikas, Saratas, Gutikas and Dandinas to the class Savitra.

EMBELICA MYROBALAN

Family: Euphorbiaceae

Sanskrit and Hindi: Dhatri, Dhattrica, Amlak, Amlaki, Anavala

English: Indian Gooseberry

Dhattrika or Dhatri which means earth or mother particularly the nursing mother, perhaps because of its nourishing juicy fruit is a tree associated with both Siva and Vishnu. In Brihaddharma Purana there is a mention about the sacredness of the tree both to Parvati and Lakshmi, the wives of Siva and Vishnu respectively. According to the legend, both the goddesses went to Prabhasa, a sacred place to worship. Parvati said to Lakslimi that she wished to worship Vishnu through *a* new material. Lakshmi answered that she also wished to worship Siva through a new material. At that the two goddesses wept and from their tears were created *Dhatri* or the *Amalaki* tree which both propitiated to worship Siva and Vishnu and since then the leaves of this tree are considered essential in the worship of Siva and Vishnu.

The tree is worshipped on Sivaratri day. It is surrounded by red and yellow thread and flowers and fruits are offered to the tree just as in any other worship. It is considered as one of the most sacred trees in Gujerat. In the month of Kartik (Oct.-Nov.) women worship the tree with flowers, sandal paste and vermillion, particularly on the 9th day of Kartik, called *Akshaya Navami* when women worship it for begetting male progeny. They make five circumbulations round the tree and tie sacred thread round its trunk each time.

Amalaki is a plant .which transformed itself into a beautiful woman to entice Vishnu away from the charms of Vrinda. (See Ocimum sanctum). The tree is very sacred to the Hindus and credited with magical properties by the tribesmen. This plant which is of great medicinal value is planted on the South side of the temple or home.

ERAGROTIS CYNASUROIDES

Family Gramineae

Sanskrit: Kusa ghas

Hindi : Kusha

The origin of *Kusa ghas* is mentioned in the Ramayana. Ramachandra left his consort Sita after they came back from their fourteen years exile, doubting her chastity and fidelity to him on hearsay because she had lived in the palace grounds of the demon king Ravana who had abducted her. (See Cocculus cordifolius). Ramachandra did this because he wished to be an ideal king and not give his people a chance to talk. Sita was with child by him at that time but even then she was sent back to the forest and there in the hermitage of Valmiki, she gave birth to twin sons Lava and Kusa. When the sons grew up and met their father, Ramachandra realised the injustice he had done to his wife by forsaking her on mere hearsay and decided to fetch her back. Seeing him come, Sita's feeling of humiliation, shame and anger at having been forsaken by him even after she had undergone the fire ordeal, to prove her innocence rose. She did not wish to go back to him. Sita being the daughter of Dharani, the goddess of earth, she prayed to the mother earth to accept her back if she considered her innocent. Just then an earthquake occurred, the earth opened where Sita was standing and Sita was buried under the debris. Seeing their mother swallowed by the earth, her son Kusa ran forward to save her but all that he could get hold of were Sita's hair which as the earth closed were left above the ground and turned into a grass which was named after her son Kusa as he had tried to save her. Since that time, the grass is held sacred.

Another story as given in the *Bhagavata Purana* says that Sita gave birth to only one son who was named Lava. Sita was in the habit of leaving her son behind in the hermitage when she went for her bath in the river but one day, unknown to Valmiki, she took the child with her. Valmiki, not finding the child in the hut thought that the child had been carried away by a wild beast and afraid that Sita, on returning from her bath and not finding her son, would die of grief, made a babe of *Kusa ghas* resembling Lava and placed him in Lava's cot. When Sita returned with Lava, she was surprised to find another boy resembling Lava lying in his cot and asked Rishi Valmiki how this second child came to be there. Valmiki then told her what had taken place and said, "Blameless one, receive this second son named Kus5 because I, by my power created him out of *Kusa ghas."* Sita brought up the two sons Kus5 and Lava for whom Valmiki performed the sacraments.

One day the two boys killed and ate a deer belonging to the hermitage and made a play thing of Valmiki's sacred Linga. Valmiki was greatly offended but at Sita's intercession, to make the expiatory penance, asked Lava to bring golden lotuses and *Mandara* flowers from Kuvera's lake and garden; to make a Linga with the flowers and worship, and then only the crime could be atoned for.

According to Valmiki's *Ramayana,* Sita gave birth to twin sons. Valmiki performed the Rakshasa rite to avert the evil eye. Taking a handful of *Kusa ghas* with its roots, he pronounced the formula for protection of the children and for the destruction of evil forces, saying, that since the first born will be rubbed with the *Kusa ghas,* blessed by the aid of *mantras* to avert the evil eye, his name shall be Kusa, and as the last born will be carefully dried by the female ascetics with the roots of the *Kusa ghas,* he shall be called Lava.-

The sacredness and immortality of the *KusS ghas* is also because of its having been sprinkled with amrta. Vinata and Kadru were both wives of Kashyap. When the Ocean of milk was being churned, the horse Uccaihcravas came out of the ocean. Without seeing the horse, Vinata and Kadru had a bet. Vinata said that the horse was pure white; Kadru said that the horse was white but had black spots on his tail. According to the bet, whoever lost had to become the slave of the other. When Kadru realised that the horse was pure white, she ordered her children, the snakes, to go and attach themselves to the tail of the horse. Having done that, the horse appeared to have a black tail from a distance. Vinata lost the bet and became the slave of Kadru. Vinata as the slave of Kadru had to suffer untold misery. Kadru agreed to release her, provided she could get *Soma rus* for her. To free Vinata from the bondage of slavery, Garuda, the son of Vinata, stole the ambrosia. As he was flying with the pot of arnrta, he got tired and placed the pot containing the ambrosia on *Kusa ghas.* A few drops of the ambrosia fell on the grass and since then the grass became sacred to the Hindus. The Nagas licked the sharp-edged grass for ambrosia and since then their tongues were cleft asunder.

According to a legend in the *Mahabharata,* Rishi Manakanaka was the son begotten by the god of wind, Vayu, upon Sukanya. Manakanaka, who in his youth, led the life of a Brahmacharya, once while performing his ablutions in the river, beheld a woman of faultless limb and fair brows bathing in the river Saraswati. Seeing her person uncovered, the Rishi was full of desire for her and his vital seed fell in the sacred Saraswati. The great ascetic took up his seed and placed it in an earthen pot. Within the pot, the fluid became divided into seven parts and from these seven portions were

born the seven Rishis who were the progenitors of the *49* Maruts. Rishi Manakanaka by his ascerism and penances came to be known in the three worlds. Once, after he had been crowned with success, his hand was pierced by a blade of *Kusa ghas* and instead of blood, vegetable juice flowed from the wound. The Rishi was so happy at the miracle that he started dancing with joy. Watching him dance, all the creatures stupified by his energy, also began to dance. When all creatures, mobile and immobile started dancing non-stop as if mesmerised, the gods with Brahma at their head and the Rishis of great ascetic merit, approached Mahadeva and informed him of Manakanaka's great feat and requested him to put a stop to this dancing. Mahadeva, desirous of doing well to the gods approached Manakanaka and addressed him thus, "Why, O Brahmana, dost thou dance in this way, acquainted as thou art with thy duties? What grave cause is there for such joy of thine, O Sage, that, ascetic as thou art, O best of Brahmafia 'and walking as thou dost along the path of virtue, thou shouldest act in this way?" The Rishi answered, "O Brahmana, seeing vegetable juice flowing from this wound of mine, I am dancing with joy!" The god laughed at the Rishi and said, "Behold me!" and saying that, Mahadeva of great intelligence struck his thumb with the end of one of his fingers and ashes white as snow came out of that wound. Seeing this happen, the Rishi was filled with wonder and understood that the god was none else than Mahadeva, the Great Supreme Being. After praising Mahendra, Manakanaka Rishi asked that his ascetic merit should not be destroyed for his : having displayed such a ridiculous behaviour Mahadeva told him that the sacredness was in the *Kusa ghas* that was capable of turning blood into' vegetable juice. Mahadeva assured him that his ascetism will increase a thousand fold and that he will always dwell in the *Tirtha* called Sapta-saraswat The Sapta-saraswat *tirtha* on the banks of the river Saraswati abounded with *Vadari* (Zizyphus jujuba), *Inguda* (Balanites Roxburghii), *Kasmaryya* (Gmelina arborea), *Plaksha* (Ficus lacor) *Aswattha* (Ficus religioloa) *Vibhitika* (Terminalia belerica) Kakkaola (Mangifera indica); *Palasa* (Butea monosperma), *Karira* (Zizyphus rotundufolia), *Pilu* (Salvadora oleoides) *Karushakas* (cannot be identified botanically) *Vilwas* (Aegle marmelos), *Amratakas* (Spondias mangifera), *Atimuktas* (Gaertinera racemosa), *Kashandas* (cannot be identified botanicaliy), *Parijatas* (Nyctanthes arbor-trestis). Baladeva having the plough for his weapon also visited this *Tirtha.*

Kusa ghas is also considered to be Vishnu or Hari in the Vishnu Purana. For all religious ceremonies *Kusa ghas* is considered essential. When a

person dies, his body is cremated and bones left unburnt are gathered and brought home before they are immersed in the river. Along with the bones, a handful of *Kusa ghas* called *Kurcha* is also brought and sprinkled on the ground where the dead body lay in the house with the chanting of a hymn which says. The soul has departed from this house. But may those left behind prosper and flourish and may their life be as green as this grass".

Even in the cult of *Soma,* there is a mention of this grass. The altar made for the sacrifice was made of *Kusa ghas.* The anomaly that comes in is that the cult of Soma worship is of Vedic origin and the epic Ramayana which gives the origin of the plant and the reason for its sacredness is of a much later date.

Confectioners, who are obliged to keep large quantities of cooked food, circumvent the taboo about eating it by keeping some Kusa *ghas* in their vessels when an eclipse is expected.

There are certain rules of conduct for a man who has taken the vow of Brahmacharya. Such a man, "Betaking himself to the path of abstention, should seek to extinguish his dependence on both the external and the internal. Sitting on *Kusa ghas,* with a *Kusa* in hand and binding his coronal locks with *Kusa,* he should surround himself with *Kusa* and have *Kusa* for robes . . . reciting the highly beneficial composition Gayatri, he should meditate with the aid of his intellect on Brahma alone".

The *Pavitra* meant for sprinkling clarified butter upon the sacrificial fire is made of blades of *Kusa ghas."* The diminutive Rishis called Valakillyas sprang from the blades of *Kusa gbas* spread out in a sacrifice. From the same blades of *Kusa ghas* sprang Atri."

The sacred mythical island Kusa dvipa is so named because of a clump of *KusS ghas* growing there. The island is believed to be surrounded by the Ghrta Sea or the sea of butter.

ERYTHRINA INDICA

Family Papilloanaceae

Sanskrit: Mandara, Parijata

Hindi: Pharad

English: Coral Tree

The sacredness of the plant is attributed to its origin from the Ocean of milk when it was churned by the Devatas and the Daityas to procure ambrosia or arprta, the drink of immortality, (see Nyctanthes arbortristis).

When the Ocean of milk was churned by using mount Mandara as the churning stick and the snake Vasuki as the churning rope, many objects made their appearance. Among them was the *Mandara* tree. India took the tree to heaven and planted it in his garden.

Long ago demon Taraka was oppressing gods and men and Indra wanted Siva to produce a son who should be strong enough to kill Taraka and be the god of war. Indra approached Brahma the Creator, who in turn entreated Siva for help. Siva then consented to beget a son on the goddess Uma and pursued the game of love with her which went on for centuries. As there appeared no end to his amorous play, the triple world trembled at the friction thus produced. Fearing lest the world perished, the gods by order of Brahma called to mind Agni in order to stop Siva's amorous play. Agni, afraid to interfere, fled and entered the waters, but the frogs getting scorched by the heat, told the gods of Agni's whereabouts. Agni curse.d the frogs and made their speech inarticulate and again disappeared. This time he fled to Siva's paradise tree, *Mandara.* He was betrayed there by the elephants and the parrots but the gods found him concealed in the trunk of the *Mandara* tree, hiding in the form of a snail. There after, Agni agreed to do as the gods wished him to. He approached Siva and by his heat stopped him from his amorous play and then humbly informed him of the commission the gods had given him. Siva agreed and deposited his seed in the fire which neither the Fire nor Um5, his wife was able to bear. Then Siva asked Um5 to worship Ganeshia, the Lord of obstacles so that a son may be born to them in the Fire and thus was born the six-faced Karttikeya, who, when he grew up, became the god of war and killed Taraka.

Mandara is one of the five trees growing in heaven and is therefore, called a Paradise tree. The tree originally grew in Vaikuntha, Indras pleasure garden. Krsna stole the tree and brought it to earth while the gods were busy arguing among themselves. The two wives of Krsna, Rukmini and Satyabhama, quarrelled for the possession of its flowers. Since Satyabhama had already got the *Parijata* tree (see Nyctanthes arbor-tristis) from Indra's heaven for her garden, the *Mandara* tree was won by Rukmini and grew in her garden and adorned her mansion. Since that time the tree is associated with Krsna.

The wood of *Mandara* is considered sacred and offered in the sacrificial lire or *Homa* and the flowers offered to Siva. According to some, Hanuman is a part of Siva and therefore the flowers of *Mandara* are also offered to him. Krsna being an incarnation of Vishnu, the flowers are sacred to him. The plant is considered sacred because of the trifoliate arrangement of its

leaves which represents the holy trinity Brahma, Vishnu, Siva. In Assam, its wood is considered sacred for cremations.

EUPHORBIA NERIFOLIA

Family Euphorbiaceae

Sanskrit: Snuhi, Manasa tree, Manasasij

Hindi: Sehund

Snuhi associated with snake worship has a peculiar story attached to it which sounds almost like a fairy tale. Long, long ago, there lived in Champaka Nagar, a wealthy merchant called Chand Sadagar who was a devout worshipper of Siva and looked contemptuously on Manasa Devi, the snake goddess. Manasa Devi felt offended at his attitude towards her and to teach him a lesson, let loose her snakes into his spacious, well laid out garden and reduced it to a wilderness, Chand Sadagar, by his devotion to Siva had acquired some magical prowess and managed to reconvert the wilderness into a garden, a garden that he was very proud of. Manasa Devi assumed the form of a beautiful maiden and enchanted Chand Sadapar. He fell madly in love with her and asked her to marry him. Manasa promised to do that on the condition that he transfers his magical powers to her. After the merchant had fulfilled this condition, Manasa assumed her natural shape and asked him to worship her. Chand's love for the maiden was converted into fierce hatred of Manasa and he refused to worship her even at the cost of his beautiful garden being once again converted into a wilderness.

Manasa now tried her next trick to woo him as her devotee and bit his six sons to death. When Chand Sadagar was wailing over his dead sons, Manasa appeared before him and asked him to be a devotee of her and she would restore them to life but the merchant refused her once again.

Time passed. Chand Sadagar set out on a long voyage and was returning home with his ships laden with rich merchandise. Manasa Devi produced a terrific gale and all his ships were sunk. Chand himself was in danger of being drowned and Manasa offered to save him if he promised to worship her. But Chand preferred death to being her devotee. Manasa was adamant on taking her revenge and did not want 'him to die. So she saved his life and cast him ashore where he had to face many privations and humiliations because of her. Instead of his relenting his attitude towards Manasa, his hatred of her increased with his miseries. After having undergone untold troubles, he atlast reached his native city. In course of time a son was born to him who was named Lakshmindra. On coming of age, Lakshmindra was

betrothed to Behula, the beautiful daughter of Saha. But the astrologers predicted his death by snake bite on his nuptial bed. To frustrate the plans of Manasa Devi, Chand engaged a well known architect to build a room of steel as the nuptial chamber for the young couple, so that no snake could enter it. But as the room was being built, Manasa appeared before the architect, intimidated him by threats and forced him to leave a slit which was disguised by a thin layer of metal.

As Lakshmindra slept, with his bride Behula keeping watch, a snake crept into the bridal chamber through the slit left open by the architect Behula, who knew of the prediction, fed the snake with milk and kept it in good humour. But as the long hours of the night slowly passed, she felt drowsy and ultimately fell off to sleep. The snake now got its opportunity and stung Lakshmindra to death. Behula woke up to see the snake crawl away after it had performed its tragic and cruel mission.

In the morning the corpse of the deceased Lakshmindra was put on a raft to let it drift down the river in the hope that it might revive, with the devoted Behula sitting besides the dead body of her husband. Behula refused to leave her husband's dead body inspite of persuasion by her relatives, saying that a wife's place was next to her husband.

The raft floated down stream, past villages and towns. Days, weeks and months passed thus, and finally at the end of six months when the body of Lakshmindra had started to decay, the raft touched ground at a place where a woman was washing clothes. The little son of the woman was causing annoyance to his mother by interfering with her work. The mother strangled her son and quietly went on with her work. After she had finished with her washing, the woman sprinkled some water on her dead son and he was revived, Behula who had witnessed this miracle, requested the washer woman to bring Lakshmindra back to life. The washer woman, who had been sent on purpose by Manasa Devi, took Behula to the snake goddess. When Behula approached Manasa Devi, she was told by her that Lakshmindra would be restored to life if she promised to convert her father-in-law and make him a devotee of Manasa. Behula agreed to this condition; Lakshmindra was restored to life and the husband and wife set out for their home. Chand Sadagar when informed of his son's miraculous recovery was very happy but did not like the condition for his recovery. However, he agreed to the condition. A man who could not be terrorised or intimidated by anything was forced ultimately to the worship of Manasa by the love of his son. Cha id offered the flowers of *Snuhi* with his left hand and with his face turned away from the image on the eleventh day of the waning moon, but for

all that, Manasa, the goddess of snakes was appeased. She had won the final battle and her worship no one dared to oppose from that day onwards. Since that day, flowers of *Snuhi* came to be accepted as the offering most dear to Manasa Devi and the plant came to be called *Manasa* tree.

The same story with slight variations appears in Maity's *Histories, studies in the cult of the Goddess Manasa.*

The *Snuhi* tree has curative qualities especially against poison and possibly because of this, it came to be associated with the goddess of snakes." The twigs of the plant are planted by women on *Dasahara* day and it is worshipped during the rainy season and on other days of Manasa worship, perhaps because during the rains, the snakes come out of their holes. The sacredness of the tree is traced back to the Indus valley period. It is believed by the followers of Manasa that on the fifth day of the dark half of the moon in the month of *Sravana* (Juiy-Aug.), goddess Manasa appears on the tree, with eight serpents spreading their hoods. The tree is worshipped for the fulfilment of vows. Since goddess Manasa is associated with a fertility cult, the *Snuhi* tree associated with it is also worshipped by women for the blessings of a child.

The latex of the plant is acrid, rubefacient, purgative and expectorant. It is used to remove warts and cutaneous eruptions, in ear-ache, asthma, and in ophthalmia.

FICUS RELIGIOSA

Family Moraceae

Sanskrit: Aswattha

Hindi: Peepul, Bo tree, Bodhi tree

English: Indian Fig tree

For antiquity and veneration, the *Aswattha* is unrivalled throughout the world. There is a mention of the tree from Vedic time onwards. The tree is mentioned in the Bhagavata Gita as *Aswattha* or the 'one that is not the same tomorrow', with reference perhaps, to this world which is ever changing. There is a superstitious belief that the plant gives off oxygen at night but this belief is not supported by any scientific fact.

The sacredness of the *Aswattha* is mentioned in the M*ahabharata:* '*Aswattha,* having its roots above and branches below is eternal. Its leaves are the Chhandas. He who knows it, knows the vedas. Downwards and upwards are stretched its branches which are enlarged by

the qualities; its sprouts are the objects of sense. Downwards, its roots leading to action are extended to this world of men". According to the footnotes given by Roy in his translation of the Mahabharata: "upwards and downwards means from the highest* to the lowest of created things. Enlarged by the qualities i.e. the qualities appearing as the body, the senses etc. The sprouts are the objects of sense, being attached to the senses themselves as sprouts to branches. The roots extending downwards are the desires for diverse enjoyments". Detailing the sacredness of *Aswattha,* it is said that its form cannot be known or its end, or its beginning, or its support. "Cutting with the hard weapon of unconcern, this *Aswattha* of roots firmly fixed, then should one seek for that place repairing wither one returneth not again . . . thinking, I will seek the protection of that primeval Sire from whom the ancient course of worldly life hath flowed".

Hindus associate the tree with the three gods Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The tree is considered to be a Brahman and worshipped daily after the morning bath. If an elderly member of the family dies, special offerings are made to it during the full thirteen days of mourning. If a boy dies during his thread ceremony, he is supposed to haunt the *Aswattha* tree.

The *Aswattha* is allegorical. Each tree is bolievcd to arise from an unperceived root which is emblematical of the body i.e. it springs from the god-head. In the Gita, the tree is supposed to typify the universe. This perhaps is because the figs of the tree are eaten by birds and its, seeds pass through the alimentary canal of the birds unharmed and take root at most unimaginable places like the roof or walls of a house or even on another tree. The root after going into the crevices of the house or into the bark of other trees then becomes invisible. *Aswattha* has aerial, hanging adventitious roots which come down to earth and act as props to the trees; the slender petioles cause its leaves to tremble readily in a breeze, making a characteristic fluttering sound.

The tree is considered to be Vishnu himself and at the same time Vishnu is believed to have been born under it. That is the reason why the tree or its branches are never cut unless it is for worship. A ceremony called *Aswattha Pratishta* or the consecration of the

Aswattha is performed to transform the tree into a divinity by-inducing Vishnu into it Brahmanas believe that untold blessings will be showered upon anyone who performs this ceremony. According to the *Mahabharata,* the man who worships *Aswattha* daily worships the whole universe. When Krsna stole the clothes of the maidens, ho took them to an *Aswattha* tree.

Even though the tree is mainly associated with Vishnu, some consider Siva as the patron deity of the tree.

Brahmanas worship the *Aswattha* during their daily evening prayer. They go to the tree and facing east repeat a prayer and sing hymns in praise of the tree which says, "Oh *Aswattha* tree! You are a God. You are king among trees. Your roots represent Brahma, the Creator; your trunk represents Siva, the Destroyer and your branches, Vishnu the Preserver. As such you are the emblem of Trimurti. All those who honour you ;in this world by performing *Upanayama,* walk round you, adoring you and singing your praise; obtain remission of their sins in this world and bliss in the next. I praise and adore you. Pardon my sins in this world and give me a place with the blessed after death". The worshipper then walks round the tree 7, 14, 21, 28, 35 or more times but always in multiples of seven.

Elwin tells us that sometimes the roots of *Aswattha* represent Brahma; its bark represents Vishnu and its branches Mahadeva. According to certain tribesmen like Muria's, the tree is not worshipped as ft is considered to be an untouchable.

The tree is regarded as a symbol of the male and is ceremoniously married to a *neem* tree which is symbolic of the female. In villages in India, usually these two trees are grown side by side with a platform built round them. On the platform inter-twined or coiled snake stones are placed which are symbols of fertility. This symbolic association of the sexes is reversed in Rajasthan and Punjab where the *Neem* (Azadirachta indica) tree is considered a male. Since women in *purdha* donot show their face to strange men, women in these areas cover their face with a veil on passing a *neem* tree. In Orissa a marriage is performed between the *Vata* (Ficus bengaltnsis) tree which is considered as the male and the *Aswattha* which is considered as the female, the tree is frequently planted near a *Vata* tree so as to mix their foliage and stems from a superstitious notion that they are of two different sexes and their growing together is regarded as an emblem of marriage.

The tree is invested with the triple cord like Brahmnn and with the same attendant ceremonies as the thread ceremony of a Brahmana. The *Aswattha* is also sometimes married to the *Kadali* tree (Musa sapientura), the two trees are grown so close and their trunks intertwine so much that they look like one.

The tree is considered sacred by some tribes of the Ganjam district of Orisa. According to them before the creation of the world, Kittung and his sister used to live in a gourd. When the gourd broke, the two started living

on the Kurabeli hill. This was at a time when there were no trees on this earth. When summer came, the sister complained of the intense heat as mere were no trees to give them shade. About this time, a squirrel bit off four fingers of the left hand of the Kittung while he was asleep at night, leaving only the third middle finger. On hearing his sister complain of the heat, the Kittung cut off his maimed left hand and put it on a stone which grew into the *Aswattha* tree called the *Onjerneban* tree by the tribal people. Th^ apex of the leaf is prolonged into a long projection which to the tribal people represents the middle finger of the Kittung's hand. The tribes make offerings to *Ratusum* in cups made of its leaves.

The sacredness of the *Aswattha* tree comes perhaps from the old vedic ritual of kindling the sacrificial fire at religious ceremonies by friction between two peculiarly shaped pieces of wood, one of which was the *Aswattha* wood and the ceremony was called 'the birth of Agni'. The vessels containing *Soma rus* were made of the *Aswattha* wood. Till today, women worship the tree by circumbulating round it, wrap cotton yarn round its trunk and water its roots.

A story in the *Mahabharata* and *Vishnu Purana* mentions the importance of *Aswattha* in the ritual of kindling the sacred fire of *Homa.* Pururavas, son of Ila and Buddha saw the heavenly nymph Urvasi sporting with her friends and instantly fell in love with her. She also fell in love with him and both lived together happily for many years. Urvasi had to ultimately return *to* her heavenly abode as an Apsara cannot live for ever with a mortal. Pururavas became inconsolable at his loss and the Gandharvas took pity on him. Since it was not possible for Urvasi to live with him on earth, these semi-divine beings decided to include Purwavas among them by msking him an immortal. They gave him the divine fire and by wishing to be united with Urvasi before it, he could become an immortal. Pururavas left the fire in the forest and went on an errand. On his return he found the fire and the pan turned into the *Aswattha* tree and the *Sami* (Acacia suma) tree respectively. In fact the *Aswattha* was growing out of the *Sami* plant.

Having lost the fire, Pururavas could not wish for permanent life with Urvasi. So he approached the Gandharvas again who asked him to make the fire drill or *Arani* from the wood of the two trees into which the fire and the pan had been converted and with the fire thus produced, wish for a permanent life with Urvasi and the wish would be granted. Pururavas first made the fire drill with two twigs of the *Sami* plant but it was not the right type of fire; then he took two twigs of *Aswattha* but still did not succeed. Ultimately he made the drill by using the upper wood of *Aswattha* and the

lower of the *Sami* plant for making the fire and the fire thus produced was the right type of fire and by wishing before it, he obtained his wish.

Since the fire is produced by friction between the *As wattha* and the Sami plant in the sacred *Horns* ceremony, the analogy between this and the intercourse of sexes is apparent. *Aswattha* is the male, *5am/* is the female and the Agni thus produced is the child. Agni once hid himself in the *Aswattha* tree and because of this temporary home of Agni devatta, *Aswattha* tree became sacred. (See Acacia suma).

The importance of sacrificial fires as initiatory rites to the final attainment of immortality has been accepted by Hindus since very early times. Their, origin lies in the philosophy that the mere mortal must realise the necessity to strive after higher and finer values and not hanker after merely earthly passions. *Homa* is performed at practically all important sacred functions such as the investiture of the sacred thread, at the hair cutting ceremony, marriage and sraddha ceremonies *etc.,* when an offering of curds, ghee, rice *etc.* are made to it.

Apsaras are said to inhabit the sacred Fig trees in which their cymbols and lutes resound. Their favourite Fig trees are the *Nyagrodha, Aswattha, Udumbara* and *Plakshi* (Ficus bengalensis, Ficus reiigiosa, Ficus glomerata, Ficus lacor (also identified as Butea monosperma)

In Bengal a ritual called *Aswatthapats-vrata* is observed by women on the last day of the month of *Vaisakh* (April-May). Five leaves of *Aswattha* are required for this ritual and each leaf signifies a different stage of human life. For instance, a new leaf for the birth of a son, a young green leaf for beauty and youth, an old leaf for long life of the husband, a dry leaf for increase in happiness and wealth, a withered leaf for precious wealth beyond expectation. The plant is a symbol of fertility and is worshipped by women for the grant of a child.

Buddhists also consider the tree sacred as Prince Siddartha sat in meditation under this tree and found enlightenment. The tree since then is known as the *Bo* or the *Dodhi* tree and Siddartha came to be known as the Buddha. A tree planted in Ceylon in B.C. 228 is still alive.

A tree of *Aswattha* is believed to be growing on the mythical island called Plaksha dvipa. The gods are said to sit under the *Aswattha* tree in the third heaven. Krsna was sitting under an *Aswattha* tree when Jara shot him in the foot with an arrow.

FICUS GLOMERATA syn FICUS RACEMOSA

Sanskrit; Uclumbara

Hindi: Gular

The tree is held sacred by the Hindus and its wood is included in the *Homa* ceremony. It is a highly medicinal plant and its fruit is kept on the person to ward off evil. The roots of the plant arc considered to be Brahma, its bark as Vishnu and its branches as Siva. The tree is compared to Vishnu, in fact one of the names of Vishnu is Udumbara. The seat of god Vivas wan, a vedic god worshipped at the end of the Soma sacrifice is made of its wood and the throne of king Soma is carved of its wood. The staff of a Vaishya, at his thread ceremony is made of it. The reason why the tree seldom has any flowers is because on the Deepavali night, the gods gather on the tree and pluck all its blossoms. In the *Atharvaveda,* it is mentioned that the sacrificial post and the sacrificial ladle was made of it.

According to Verrier Elwin, the Dumariyan clan worship the tree for the gift of a child.

Udumbara is the *Bodhi* tree or the tree of Enlightenment of Kanaka Muni.

FICUS KRISHNII

Sanskrit & Hindi: Krishna

The sacredness of this tree is because of the association of the tree with the Krsna legend. It is said that Krsna used to make a cup of its leaves to steel butter and curds in them from the gopies with whom he used to sing and dance in Brindavana. Since that time, the tree puts forth leaves which have their lamina joined at the base forming a shallow cup.

FICUS BENGALENSIS syn FICUS INDICA

Sanskrit: Nyagrodha, Kalpa-vrksha

Hindi: Vata, vad, Bargad, Ber

English: Banyan

Nyagrodha symbolises Siva and is therefore held sacred. The tree is called the crested one. The ability of the tree to support its ever growing branches and weight by the development of adventitious roots from its branches, roots which hang down and act as props over an ever widening circle, represents eternal life and the tree is therefore, considered a symbol of long life. It is worshipped and associated with godhead. The tree is also considered as a symbol of Brahma and is worshipped on Vad-Savitiri day and on Saturdays

in the month of *Jaistha* (May-June) by women praying for the long life of their husbands. Often the tree is grown in close proximity with another tree, i.e. the *neem* (Azadirachta indica) tree. The intertwined branches of the two trees, to the Hindus are Holy union and the tree being sacred, they object to felling it.

To some Oriyan tribes, the tree is the Sadru-shrine of the gods and it is sacrilege to cut it. The taboo against felling it is so great that if anyone cuts it in ignorance, he has to sacrifice a goat to the gods living on the tree. Special offerings are made to the gods of the tree at harvest time. At Guar and Karya ceremonies, cups are made of its leaves for pouring libations. The tribesmen consider die tree as mother, for according to a story, two orphan children were left under the tree and they were nourished by the milk or the latex that -dripped from the tree and were thus saved from starvation.

The *Nyagrodha* tree has been referred in Hindu Mythology as the *Kalpa-vrksha* or the wishfulfillmg tree ... a tree that gives to the worshipper food and drink, dresses and ornament, gift of children and even beautiful maidens. "This anthropomorphic worship of the tree is represented in a Buddhist sculpture from Besnagar. The tree has been depicted with its long, pendanc, adventitious roots dropping untold wealth in the form of gold pieces, and the vcssals placed beneath the tree over-flowing with them. According to the *Mahabharata* the south of the Nila and north of the Nishadha, there is a huge *Jumvu* (Syzgium cumini syn. Eugena jambolcna) tree that is eternal and wish-fulfilling. In the Bhagavata Purana, - *Kadamba* (Anthocephallus cadamba) tree is the *Kaipa-vrksh.* Sometimes the *Parijata* (Nyctanthes arbor-tristis) is also referred as the *Kalpa-vrksha.*

The tribal people Pardhans worship the tree because of the following reasons. When Guru Jalranda of the Pardhans died, his body was buried by his sons under a tree of *Palasa* (Butca frondosa). The sons used to light a fire on the grave daily to keep away the wild animals from desecrating the grave. One day they found a *Nyagrodha* tree growing out of the grave. The eldest son saw his father in a dream that night who asked him to serve the tree as it had grown out of their father's bones and brains. According to the Pardhan's, the adventitious, hanging roots of the tree are the long and matted hair of the guru.

There are three trees associated v/ith Jie attainment of Omniscience by the Buddha. Buddha sat for seven days under an *Aswattha* tree, the tree of Enlightenment, growing on the banks of the river Nairanjans, absorbed in the bliss cf his enlightenment. Then he arose and sat under a *Nyagrodha* tree for seven days, absorbed in the bliss of his illumination. At the end of that

period he sat in blissful calm under a third tree. The three trees are known as: The tree of Enlightenment; Tree of the Goatherd; Tree of the serpent king Muchalinda respectively. The last tree is so named because Muchalinda, the serpent king, protected Buddha with his hood from a storm as Buddha sat in meditation under it.

In *Vishnu Parana,* the tree is compared to Vishnu. "As the wide spreading *Nyagrodha* tree is compressed in a small seed, so at the time of dissolution, the whole universe is comprehended in thee as its germ. As the *Nyagrodha* germinates from the seed and becomes first a shoot and then rises into loftiness, so the created world proceeds from thee and expands into magnitude".

Nyagrodha planted in front of temples is tenanted by either Krsna or Siva. The tree planted in public places like cross-roads, village squares are tenanted by lesser divinities such as Yakshas, Kinnaras, Gandharvas etc. The rustling of the leaves of the tree is attributed to the deities residing on it. It grows on Pushkara dvipa, a special abode of Brahma. The dvipa is surrounded by a sea of fresh water. Its milky juice is regarded as a remedy for tooth ache, rheumatism and lumbago.

Nyagrodha is the *Bodhi* tree or the tree of Enlightenment of Kashyapa Muni.

During the universal deluge at the end of an epoch, Narayana slept on a leaf of *Nyagrodha.*

HIPTAGE MADABLOTA

Sanskrit & Hindi: Madhavi lata
English: Hiptage

According to Vishnu Purana, Madhavi was the wife of Madhav which is.'another name-for Vishnu and the plant has been named after her. Symbolically she, the mother of the earth, is the creeping Vine and Vishnu is the tree round which she clings for support.

This plant which is a creeper with large, white, fragrant flowers was well known to ancient Hindus and is frequently mentioned in ancient Indian literature. In flower symbolism, the Hindus compared the *Madhavi lata* to a frail young woman who clings for support to her lord and master, symbolised by the strong mango tree. There is a reference of the plant in Kalidasa's famous play, 'Sakuntala'. When the hermit Kanva discovered that his adopted daughter Sakuntala had met Dushyanta, the msn of her

choice, he said to her that he hod for long, been looking for a handsome mango tree referring obviously to Dushyanta and that now he would give his *Madhavi lata* i.e. Sakunttila to him in marriage.

Madhavi lata is a plant of great medicinal value, particularly useful for dermatitis. An application made from it is considered highly beneficial in scabies. Its bark is aromatic; used in medicine to cure rheumatism and asthma.

IMPERATA CYLINDRICA

Family Gramincac

Sanskrit & Hindi: Munja ghas

The moon is considered a deity. According to *Skands Purana* he is the son of Atri and Anasuya. He is considered a Brahmana and the King of priests. But the most popular belief is *(Bhagavata Purana, Mahabharata* and *Vishnu Purana)* that he sprang from the Ocean of milk when it was churned to extract ambrosia. *Brhadaranaika Upanishad* makes him a Ksatriya and a pricely knight.

At first moon was a very pious being and performed the Rayasuya sacrifice but he became arrogant and licentious. One day he saw Tara or Taraka, the wife of Vrhaspati, the teacher of the gods and fell in love with her. He carried her off and inspite of repeated requests by Vrhaspati, he refused to send her back. This led to a serious quarrel in which the sage U§anas, supported by the antigods and -danavas, daityas etc. sided with Soma. Indra, the lord of heaven and most of the gods sided with Vrhaspati. A fierce battle ensued termed Tarakamaya or Taraka war. Soma was cut into two by Siva’s trident. The earth shaken by the fierce struggle, approached Brahma for protection, Brahma approached by the Earth, decided to stop the war. He compelled Soma, the moon to send Taraka back to her husband. Taraka by that time was pregnant. Vrhaspati, her husband did not desire her to carry the child any more and ordered her to get rid of it. Taraka gave birth to a son of great beauty whom she deposited in a clump of *Munja ghas.* Both Soma, the moon and Vrhaspati were fascinated by the beauty and radiance of the child and claimed the child as theirs. Tara was ashamed to admit the paternity of the child and kept quiet. At this the child was incensed and said, “Unless, vile woman, you declare who is my father, I will sentence you to such a fate as shall deter every female in future from hesitating to speak the truth”. Brahma appeased the anger of the child and then asked Tara to speak the truth. Tara, blushingly confessed that Soma was the father

of the child. The Lord of constellations then embraced his son and called him wise. Hence the child was named Buddha and became the planet mercury.

Since Buddha, the son of Moon was deposited in a clump of *Munja ghas,* the plant became sacred. The sacred thread of Brahmanas is made of the *Munja ghas.*

ISCHAEMUN AUGUSTIFOLIUM

Family Gramineae

Hindi: Sabai

A Birhor tribal legend explains the origin of the grass. Some men murdered their only sister but she came back to life and forgave them. The brothers felt ashamed of themselves and asked mother earth to accept them back as they could not face their sister. The earth obliged and swallowed them. The sister tried to save her brothers by catching hold of their hair which alone remained above the earth. The hair later turned into *Sabai* grass.

Gadaba tribal legend is similar to the above story with regard to the brother and sister relationship. In this story, it is the fear of curse attached to incest which causes the tragedy and it is the girl who goes under the earth as she is ashamed of her intimate relations with her brother. As the sister is being engulfed by the earth, the brother tries to rescue her but manages to catch only her hair before the earth closes and the sister is trapped under the earth. Her hair which remained above the surface turned into *Sabai* grass.

MANGIFERA IND1CA

Family Anacardaceae

Sanskrit: Amra

Hindi : Aam

English: Mango

The mango tree is considered sacred both by the Hindus and the Buddhists. Lord Buddha was once presented with a grove of mango trees under which he used to repose and since then the Buddhists consider the tree holy. According to a Burmese legend, a gardener presented Buddha with a large mango fruit. The fruit was cut and prepared by his favourite disciple Ananda, for Buddha to eat. Afterwards Buddha handed the stone-of the fruit to Ananda to plant it in a suitable place. When Ananda had planted the stone

as directed, Buddha washed his hands over it and suddenly a beautiful white mango tree sprang from it bearing flowers and fruits. This story is represented in a sculpture at Bharhut.

Hindus consider the plant of great religious significance. They consider the plant as a transformation of the god Prajapati, Lord of all creation. Therefore, on all religious and sacred days, Hindus use its twigs as tooth brushes and its leaves as spoons for pouring libations,

Villagers in India believe that the mango tree puts forth fresh green leaves at the birth of a son. So a tradition is being perpetuated and mango leaves are festooned across the doorways of a house where a son is born. The plant being considered auspicious, its leaves are also hung over the doorways of a house where marriage ceremonies are performed, perhaps in the hope that [he young married couple would beget a son.

The- origin of the tree is seeped in mythology. The daughter of Surya deva, the Sun God was being persecuted by an enchantress. She threw herself into a pond and changed into a lotus flower to escape-the evil designs of the enchantress. A certain king saw the flower and desired to possess it. But before the king could take possession of it, the enchantress burnt it and from the ashes of the lotus arose the mango tree. The king saw the tree ladden with the mango fruit and decided to keep the fruit with him. When the fruit ripened and fell to the earth, from it came out the daughter of the Sun God, whom the king recognised as having been his wife in an earlier birth.

In aboriginal India, the bride and the bridegroom have to circumvent a tree before the marriage ceremony can be performed. For this purpose the bride smears the *Mahua* (Bassia latifolia) tree with vermilion, walks round it and then embraces it. The bridegroom performs a similar ceremony with the mango tree.

According to an Oriyan tale, the tree was created by the Kittung from the thigh bone of a goat sacrificed to him, a bone left behind accidently by the worshipper. The tree is also associated with the Kinchesum, a god accepting human sacrifice in the tribal world of India. It is also a favourite tree for people committing suicide by hanging. The Gadaba and Kond tribes associate the mango with the human testicles as the seed of the fruit resembles them. According to a Bonda story, death came to the world through the mango. Gadaba and Bondo mourners at a funeral have to step over the mango bark before they can return home. Gadabas also use mango branches in a prophylactic rite to avert disease from a village. Practically all

the tribes in India observe a Mango fruit festival, before which it is taboo to eat the fruit.

The wood of the tree being sacred, it is included in the funeral pyres as well as in the sacred ceremony of *Homa.* The flowers of Mango are dedicated to the moon to whom they are offered on the second day of *Magh* (Feb-March), and also to Madan, the god of love.

The mango tree in Brahmasaras is in the’s’hape of Brahma. He who waters it will lead the Prtrs to salvation.

During his separation from Parvati, Siva sat under an *Amra* tree and through the grace of Lalita was ultimately married to Parvati when he went to mount Kailash.

MORINGA POLEIFERA

Family Moringaceae.

Sanskrit & Hindi: Amarphal
English: The Immortal fruit.

Amarphal or the Immortal fruit is a creeper which bears very unusual fruits. The fruit is approximately 500 mm long and 100 mm in circumference and ripens slowly from August to October. Its upper portion resembles a pine cone and its skin which is edible falls down by itself. The rest of the fruit continues to grow and ripens for a very long time. As the fruit continues to ripen after it has been cut from the creeper, it is called Immortal or *Amar.*

According to a story, the fruit revolutionised the life of Raja Bhartarihari of ancient India. An ascetic gave the fruit to the Raja. The Raja decided to present the fruit to his wife Bhanumati. Unknown to the king, the queen had a paramour and she in turn passed the fruit to him. But this man in turn was not faithful to the queen and gave the fruit to a prostitute. Since the king in ancient India was considered to be the earthly representative of god, the prostitute felt that only a king deserved such a rare treat and'gave the fruit to him. On receiving back the fruit which he had presented to his wife, the king got a rude shock on realising his wife's infidelity to him. He decided from that day to forsake her and his kingdom and became an ascetic.

MUSA SAPIENTUM

Family Musaceae

Sanskrit: Rambha, Kachii

Hindi : Kela

English: Plantain, Banana.

In the *Vishnu Parana, a* salutation to Vishnu is as follows: 'As the bark and leaves of the *Kadali* tree are to be seen in its stem, so thou art the stem of the universe and all things are visible in thee'.

Kadali plants are considered auspicious by the Hindus, particularly by the followers of Vishnu and Siva, as the plant is believed to be the incarnation both of Parvati, the wife of Siva and Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu. The *Kadali* plants, particularly its leaves are considered sacred for purposes of religious ceremonies and entire plants are placed at the entrance of houses of marriage, also to decorate the *pandels* erected for marriage ceremonies to

symbolise fertility and plenty. *Kadali* fruit is offered to the deities at the temples. The plant is worshipped in the month of Kartik (Oct.-Nov.) by women desirous of having male progeny. The plant is a symbol of fecundity and a bride is given the banana fruit to assure her having male progeny. The image of the goddess Nanda Devi is carved out of its trunk. The Plantain deity identified with Lakshmi and Parvati is an agricultural deity called Navapatrika. A life size statue is carved out of the *Kadali* plant and dressed like a bashful bride with *Bilva* (Aegle marmetos) fruit as her breasts, supported by a piece of sugar cane (Saccharum officinalis). The leaves of the plant twisted like a bow represents the head and hair of the deity. *Kachu* (Arum colocasia), *Haridra* (Curcuma indica), *Jayanti* (Hordeum vulgare), *Dadima* (Punica granata), *Ashoka* (Saraca indica), *Dhanya* (Oryza sativa), represent the different parts of her body. This Navapatrika is worshipped as Lakshmi. She is also placed in front of a *Bilva* tree and worshipped for invocation of Durga. The Navapatrika or the nine plants is the symbol of goddess Durga, sometimes also associated with the Sun-God. It is worshipped mainly by women for the gift of a child's prosperous life and a husband.

According to an Oriyan tribal story the plant was the creation of Bimma. As the plant bore nourishing fruit and every part of it was useful, Rama became jealous of Bimma's creation and cursed it to die after producing only one bunch of flowers. But this is not a fact. Banana plant is a perennial plant and 'produces flowers and fruits season after season. The banana fruit is offered by certain tribes of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh to gods Kittungsum and Mardisum and is used in all religious and marriage ceremonies.

The reason why the Plantain bears fruit without pollination *is* described in a very interesting Gadaba story. Long, long ago, there were five sisters called Mango, Tamarind, Fig, Jamun and Plantain.

When the sisters came of age, their father was worried about finding many, many children. When Plantain was asked what she desired, she said: 'I certainly want children but not a husband. And I also want to get old soon and not have to wait for a long time'.

In course of time, Mango, Tamarind, Fig and Jamun got married and bore so many children that their husbands ran away in sheer fright. The girls in their next life were born as trees and bore many fruits which symbolically are the children they bore in an earlier birth. Plantain did not marry but produced children and grew old. And that 'is why, till to day the Plantain

plant bears fruit parthenogenetically i.e. without pollination and the fruits do not bear any seeds.

A story in the *Mahabharata* says that before the outbreak of the battle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, Krsna went as a mediator. The Pandavas did not want to go to war against their cousins, the Kauravas. But the Kauravas were adamant and would not listen to the sane advice given by Krsna, even after he had predicted the destruction of the entire race. Defeated at his mission of bringing about a rapproachment between the two rival sections of the family, Krsna went to the house of Vidura who was a half brother both to the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Vidura was not at home and his wife Viduri, offered Krsna the *Kadali* fruit. She was so enraptured by the presence of Krsna who had graced her threshold that absent mindedly she threw away the *Kadali*- fruit and offered only the banana peel to Krnsa. Krsna had noticed this but kept on eating the banana peel as they were offered to him with a pure heart and unflinching devotion.

NELUMBIUM SPECIOSUM

Family Nymphaeceae

Sanskrit: Pundarika

Hindi: Padma, Kamala, Kumuda

English: The Sacred lotus

The symbol of lotus occurs and re-occurs in Hindu and Buddhist literature. It is a symbol of eternity, plenty and good fortune. At present Lotus is mainly associated with Brahma, the demiurgic creator and the pristine embodiment of the universal spirit who was born of a lotus. A stalk of lotus arose from the navel of Vishnu as he lay reposing on his snake couch Ananta in the celestial waters. This lotus which bore Brahma, is considered as a duplicate manifestation of the Goddess Padma herself.

From the earliest vedic tines, water has been regarded in India as a manifestation of the divine ersence and that is why oceans and rivers figure so frequently in Hindu mythology. *Pundarika* or lotus grows in the water and this is considered as the primeval waters of the spirit or the life maintaining element. Whereas Vishnu is the chief procreator of the universe, his wife Padma (Lotus) is second only to him. She is also called Sri or Lakshmi i.e. Prosperity, Fortune and Beauty. For this reason the Hindu kings apart from being married to their earthly queens are also married to Sri Lakshmi or the Raj Lakshmi who is considered as the very incarnation of

good-luck and fortune. If Raj-Lakshmi forsakes a king, there is a danger of his losing his kingdom. In the *Rg-veda,* the lotus goddess Sri or Lakshmi is praised as Padma sambhava (lotus born); Padmesthita (standing on a lotus); Padmavarna (lotus coloured); Padma-Uru (lotus thighed); Padmaksi (lotus eyed); Padmini or Pushkarini (abounding in lotuses); Pauma. malini (decked with lotus garlands); Madhavi (honey like); Hiranyamayi (made of gold); Yishnupatni (wife of Vishnu).

The lotus unfolds the universe. According to *Gopala-uttara-tapini upanishad* “the immaculate lotus rising from the depth of the water and even remote from the shore is associated with the notion of purity and with the cohesive tendency (sattva) from which spring the law-of-conduct (dharma) and knowledge (jnana). It is sometimes taken as the emblem of the six transcendent powers (bhaga) which characterize divinity (bhaga-van)”.

The Goddess Padma does not figure in the earlier vedas because like the lotus plant, she is also a product of India and only when the Aryan invaders came to this land did Goddess Padma make its “appearance in “vedic hymns. Pundarika or or lotus is the creation of the divine life substance and that is why the celestial waters produce a thousand petaled lotus of pure gold before the universe is created. This lotus opens to give birth to the demiurge creator Brahma who then creates the universe. Waters are considered female and the cosmic lotus is the womb from which issues Brahma who creates the earth.

The Goddess Padma was worshipped as the mother but with the Aryan invasion of India and the installation of their patriarchal gods she was relegated to a-servi’e position and is depicted as pressing the feet of her Lord Vishnu, and Brahma, the Creator was installed on her lotus throne. But with the merging of the Vedic and the earlier traditions she was re-instated in her position of honour. Even among the Buddhists, Padmapani or Avalokiteshvara like Vishnu, has divine powers. Very often the lotus goddess is depicted not in a human term but by her symbols, a sta’k of lotus or the lotus pedastal, the Padma-asana. Often her symbols are consigned to other deities. Quoting Zimmer,“the lotus symbol, which originally gave birth to beings and existences in unending succession, now carries the powerful wisdom of Nirvana: the word that puts an end to all individualised existence, whether in heaven or on earth”.

The *Pancavimsa Brahmana* states that the lotus flower is born of the light of the Naksatras, and the Atharvaveda compares the human heart to the lotus.

According to the *Bhagavata* Purana, Gokula is compared to the thousand petalied lotus with Govinda sitting on its disc. The petals are the seats of different performances of Sri Krsna and of different occult centres. The southern petal contains the occult seat attainable with difficulty by ascetics. The S.E.petal contains two recesses. The eastern petal has the most purifying properties. The N.E.petal is the seat of fruition, and the gopies attained Krsna on this petal by worshipping Katyayani, also Krsna hid the clothes of the gopies on this petal. The northern petal of the lotus is the seat of the twelve Adityas find is considered as good as the disc itself.

The N.E. petal is the seat of Kaliya. Respect and favour were shown to the wives of Vedic Rishis on the western petal. Also the Asura Agha was killed here. Here is also the lake called Brahman. Asuras Vyoman and Santha-cinda were killed on the S.W. petal.

Eight petals are situated in Brndavana. Outside Brndavana, there “are sixteen petals. The first petal is the seat of Govardhana where Krsna was installed as Govinda. The first petal contains Madhuvana (Bassia latifolia), the second *Khadira* (Acacia catechu), the fourth *Kadamba* (Anthocephalus cadamba), the fifth Nandisvana or the residence of Nanda, the sixth Nanda, the seventh *Vakula* (Mimusops elangii), the eighth *Taia* (Borassus urn belli form), where the Asura Ohenuka was killed; the ninth *Kumuda* (Nelumbium speciosum), the tenth Kamya where Brahma knew Krsna as Vishnu; the eleventh many forests; the twelfth *Bhandtra* (Ficus bengalensis), the thirteenth *Bhadra* (Shorea robusta), the fourteenth *Sri* (Aegle marmelos), the fifteenth Lohar and the sixteenth Mahavana. The deeds of Bal-lcrsna up to the age of five took place at Mahavana.

Kamalasana or the lotus seat as its support is one of the favourite themes in literature and sculpture. Brahma is seated on the lotus arising from the navel of Vishnu; Saraswati has a white lotus as her seat, Sveta-padmasana and Lafcshmi is depicted as sitting on a red lotus. Her home is the lotus pond. In fact in India, practically every deity is represented on a lotus seat. In fact the whole world is conceived as a huge lotus.

Many plants like the lotus, the *Sami* and the *Mandara* owe their sacredness to the fact that a deity once resided in the plant as is borne out by the following story.

Rishi Dadhichi of Bhrigu’s race was approached by the deities with Indra at their head, to discard his earthly body, so that a deadly weapon could be made from his bones with the help of which their enemies could be killed. Dadhichi, concentrated his soul by his Yoga powers and cast off his body.

Dhatri, taking the bones of the Brahmana created an irresistible weapon called the Thunderbolt with the help of which Indra struck Viswarupa, the son of Tashtri. Having killed the son of Tashtri, Indra severed the head from the body. From the energy still residing in the lifeless body of Viswarupa was born a mighty Asura called Vritra. Vritra being also an enemy of Indra, he was also killed by the latter. In consequence of this double sin of Brahmanicide, Indra was greatly frightened and had to abandon the sovereignty of heaven. By his yogic attributes of Anima i.e. super-human powers by which one could become rninute, he became small and entered the fibres of a cool lotus stalk growing in the Manasa Lake. When the Lord of the three worlds thus hid himself, the attributes of Rajas and Tamas assailed the deities; *mantras* uttered by the great Rishis lost all efficacies; people became an easy prey to Rakshasas. The deities and the Rishis then decided to crown Nahusha as the king of the three worlds and thus law and order was restored. After a while, Nahusha felt that he enjoyed all that belonged to Indra but still Indra's spouse Sachi was not his. He visited Sachi one day and asked her to be his wife, saying: The position of Indra is now being occupied by me. I deserve to enjoy the dominion and all the precious possessions of Indra. Thou wert Indra's and therefore should be mine". Since Sachi did not want to become Nahusha's wife, she.gave him a false promise of meeting him on a particular day.She then proceeded to Vrihaspati to find out her husband's whereabouts. Vrihaspati asked her to invoke the boon giving goddess Upasruti. Invoked by Sachi with the aid of proper *mantras,* Upasruti appeared before her and conducted her to Lake Manasa and pointed out Indra residing within the fibres of a lotus stalk. Seeing Sachi so pale and emancipated, Indra became exceedingly anxious and asked her the cause of it. Sachi told him of Nahusha's desire to make her his wife. Indra instructed Sachi thus: "Go and say unto Nahusha that he should come to thee on a vehicle never used before and unto which some Rishis should be harnessed." Thus counselled by her lord, Sachi left with a joyous heart and Indra re-entered the fibres of the lotus stalk. Seeing Sachi come back to heaven, Nahusha was happy and desired her. Sachi then told him what Indra had instructed her to say. Nahusha agreed and harnessing a few Rishis to the vehicle, he set out to meet Sachi. Agastya muni did not approve of this disrespect shown to the Rishis. Nahusha insulted him by kicking him with his foot. At that insult, Agastya cursed him to fail to earth. With the fall of Nahusha, the three worlds were again without a king and chaos reigned. The deities and the Rishis then gathered again and requested Vishnu to remove the curse of Brahminicide from Indra. Vishnu agreed provided Indra performed the horse sacrifice- Led

by Sachi. The deities then proceeded to the Manasa Lake where Indra was residing in a lotus stalk and rescued him from the curse. Because Indra once resided in the lotus stalk, the plant is held sacred.

The plant is also held sacred because of Vishnu. Vishnu used to offer one thousand lotus buds daily in worship to Siva. One day as he was going to offer the lotus buds, he found that one bud was missing.

Since his eyes were always compared to the lotus buds, he took out one eye and substituted it for the missing lotus buds.

The rootstock of the lotus called *Padmaka* or *padmakashta* goes into the composition of many drugs. The seeds and stalks are edible.

An offering of lotus stalks to deities at temples is considered highly auspicious. *Pundarika* or the white lotus plant is believed to be the *Bodhi* plant or the plant of enlightenment of Rishi Sikhi.

NICOTIANA TABACCUM

Family Solanaceae

Hindi: Tambaku

English: Tobacco

The tobacco plant of commercial importance was introduced into India as late as the 15th Century A.D. by the Portuguese and that is perhaps why, there are no Hindu myths connected with the plant, rpr is it considered to be sacred by them. But a large number of tribal myths connected with the plant are current, though very likely they refer to the wild varieties of the plant.

With slight variations, all the stories appear to be based on the same legend. There was a king who had an ugly daughter whom no one would marry inspite of all temptations of money and wealth offered by the Raja. The girl grew in years and when she realised that she would have to remain single all her life, she killed herself in desperation. At the time of her death, she was given a boon by the gods that in whatever form she came back.fo earth, she would be loved and desired by men. After her death, she was cremated and from her ashes grew the tobacco plant loved by most men.

Another type of stories concerning the tobacco plant are related to poverty. There was a very—poor family who could not afford the traditional Indian hospitality. The family killed itself rather than feel embarrassed at having nothing to offer to their guests. At their death, gods feel sorry for the poor people and promised to give them something inexpensive so that in future they did not feel the humiliation of having nothing to offer to their

guests. And thus were bom the tobacco, the betel and the Areca nut, all inexpensive items which the poor in India offer to their guests.

Another very interesting story relates to Mahadeva. Mahadeva was a little mad from the day of his birth. Soon after he married Parvati, he came home very hungry and asked for food and Parvati was late in getting his dinner. When he kept on asking for food, Parvati thinking that he wanted to take his pleasure with her kept on smiling at hirn. In this way ten years passed. Then Ganesh was born but Mahadeva still does not change. He kept on asking for food and Parvati got weary of him. At last when she could not bear his persistent demands of food any longer, she went to the forest and picking up a leaf, prayed to Vanaspad, the lord of vegetation and asked him to make her husband love her. Then she came home, rolled one leaf into a pipe, powdered another leaf and filled the pipe with it and left the pipe near the food she was cooking. When Mahadeva came home and asked for food, she put a little fire into the pipe and gave it to him. Mahadeva began to smoke and soon forgot about the food and Parvati cooked the food in her own good time. Parvati then grew the plant of tobacco in her garden so that Mahadeva could have his pipe. Since then tobacco became known to mankind.

NYCTANTHES ARBOR-TKISTIS

Family Oleaceae

Sanskrit: Parijata

Hindi: Harshingar

English: Tree of sorrow, Night Jasmine

The origin of the tree goes back to the churning of the milky ocean. When Hari, the preserver of the universe was approached by gods for protection from affliction, desires, troubles and grief, he assured them of renewed energy to fight evil and said: “Let all the gods in association with the Asuras cast all sorts of medicinal herbs into the sea of milk, take the serpent Vasuki for the churning rope, mount Mandara as the churning stick and churn the ocean together for ambrosia, depending upon my aid. Then drink the arnrta thus produced from the agitated ocean and you will become immortal”. The gods in alliance with the asuras did as they were told and started churning the ocean. Vishnu himself provided the pivot by becoming a tortoise on whose back the stick was pivoted.

From the ocean thus churned by the gods and the demons, first arose Surabhi the celestial cow as a fountain of milk and curds; then appeared

Varuni, the goddess of wine her eyes roiling with intoxication. Next arose the celestial *Parijata* tree perfuming the universe with its blossoms followed by a troop of Apsaras, the heavenly nymphs. Then came the cool-eyed moon which was seized by Mahadeva and adorns his head; then poison which would have endangered the sea but was seized by the Nagas or the snakes. The Lord of medicine, Dhanwantri, robed in white and bearing in his hand the cup of ambrosia came next. Then seated on a lotus flower and resplendent with all her beauty arose Goddess Sri.

The story of the churning of the ocean appears with slight modifications in several of the *Puranas.* The *Parijata* tree of the *Matsya Purana* list of articles secured from the churning of the milky ocean is considered as a *Kalpa-vrksha,* the heavenly tree which symbolises mind. As the name implies, it remains with each one of us from birth and whatever one desires under its shade one gets.

The *Parijata* tree which arose from the milky ocean was taken by Indra and planted in his heavenly pleasure garden Vaikuntha. A demon called Andhaka, son of the sage Kashyapa and Dili, tried to cany it off and was slain by Siva. According to the *Bhagavata Parana,* Krsna took away the *Parijata* tree from Indra's garden after subduing the gods. He was incited to do so by his wife Satyabhama who was desirous of possessing it Harivamsa mentions that Satyabhama was excited by Narada Muni's presentation of the flowers of the celestial *Parijata* tree to Krsna's chief wife Rukmini, and desired to possess the tree itself. With a view to see the tree for herself she paid avisit to Vaikuntha.

With the assent of Aditi, Indra conducted Satyabhama to the pleasure gardens of the gods where she saw the *Parijata* tree, the favourite tree of Sachi, the queen of Indra. This tree had a bark of gold, its young sprouting leaves were of a copper colour and it bore numerous clusters of small, fragrant flowers. On seeing the tree, Satyabhama taunted her husband Govinda and said:

"If as you have always said that I am your favourite queen, then-transport this ^ivine tree to Dwaraka where it wculd be the ornament of my mansion. I will shine among my fellow queens with the flowers of this tree adorning the braids of my hair".

When Satyabhama approached Krsna thus with her request, he took the *Parijata* tree and put it upon Garuda to take it away. The keepers of the garden remonstrated with him saying that as the tree belonged to Sachi, Hari could not take it away. It was audacity on the part of Krsna to dare such a

thing and he would be punished for it. He should not provoke the wrath of Indra, otherwise there would be unpleasant consequences.

Satyabhama was enraged at this and said: “What right has Sachi and Indra to the *Parijata* tree. As it was produced at the churning of the ocean, it is the common property of all. Why should then only Indra possess it? Sachi, confident of her husband’s strength has kept it to herself. I will not submit to her. If her husband is obedient to her authority, let him prevent my husband from taking it from here. I challenge Sachi and say that I, a mortal will take this *Parijata* tree away from her”.

Indra, taking an army of celestial beings, marched to the defence of the *Parijata* tree. The battle raged for long, the myriad darts and the innumerable missiles were spread far and wide. The air reverberated with the sound of shells and shafts; the arrows were scattered over great distances like fleeces of cotton from the pods of the *Salmali* (Salmalia malabaricum) tree. But ultimately Krsna’s discus Sudarsana cut Indra’s thunderbolt to pieces. Seeing Indra retreat, Satyabhama taunted hirn and said:

“King of the triple world, it ill becomes the husband of Sachi to run away. Adorned with garlands made of the *Parijata* flowers, Sachi will approach you. Of what use is the sovereignty of heaven with the *Parijata* tree no longer there? And how will you then face Sachi who will meet you with affection? Nay, fly not, you must not suffer shame. Here take the *Parijata* tree; let not the gods get annoyed. I do not want the *Parijata* tree”.

The king of gods, Indra, turned back at the reproach and answered: “I am not ashamed of being vanquished by him who is the author of Creation, Preservation and Destruction of the world”. On hearing this, Krsna told Indra that he did not want to take the tree and that it could remain in Indra’s garden. But Indra answered: “Let this *Parijata* tree be transferred to Dwaraka and it shall remain upon earth so long as thou abidest in the world of mortals”.

The tree was then transported to Dwaraka where it was planted in Satyabhama’s garden. The fragrance of its flowers perfumed the earth for three furlongs and it is said that anyone who beheld the tree could recollect the events of his prior existence.

The name Tree of Sorrow’ or ‘arbor-tristis’ • refers to the night flowering habit of the plant. This name is connected with the following story.

There was once a princess who fell in love with Surya-deva, the resplendent, handsome and shining Sun-god. He sported with her for a while and then deserted her. The princess ‘.as heart broken and in despair killed

herself and her body was cremated. From where her ashes fell, arose this tree of sorrow. Since Surya-deva was the cause of the death of the princess, the tree is unable to bear the sight of the sun and in its natural habitat is found in deep forests. It blooms only at night and with the first ray of dawn, its orange centred while flowers are dropped.

The flowers are usually offered to the gods of the forest for favouring the shikari in his km. They are also used for garlands and are commonly placed on biers.

OCIMUM SANCTUM

Family Labiateae

Sanskrit: Tulasi

Hindi: Tulsi

English: Sacred Basil

Tulasj-tulana-nasty, ataeva tulasi' i.e. nothing can equal the virtues of *Tulasi* is a common saying. *Tulasi* is the meeting point of heaven and earth.

According to one version, *Tulasi* plant was got as a result of the churning of the milky ocean (see Nycanthes arbor-tristis).

Tulasi plant has a beautiful legend attached to its origin. Tulasi was married to a demon called Jalandhar who was born of the sweat of Mahadeva that fell in the sea. Because of his severe austerities and penances he had been blessed by Vishnu and given a boon which made him invincible to men, gods and demons, so long as his wife was faithful to him. Tulasi or Vrinda the name by which she was known as the wife of Jalandhar, was known for her conjugal fidelity.

Getting arrogant of his invincible state, Jalandhar started committing atrocities on men. A time came when his excesses against humanity went beyond endurance.For a redress of their grievances, men took a deputation to Vishnu. Vishnu told them of the boon that he himself had given the demon and said that the only way to kill him was, if his wife was made unfaithful to him. Tulasi was so devoted to her husband that she would not even look at another man. Since the condition imposed for the demon's death was impossibility, the mortals requested Vishnu, the Preserver, to come to their rescue. Vishnu agreed and approached Tulasi in the form of her husband and seduced her. Having made her unfaithful to her husband, even though unwittingly, the demon was then easily killed. When Tulasi found out the ruse played on her, she confronted Vishnu in shame and rage and demanded

an explanation for having been made a widow even when she had served Vishnu with unflinching faith and devotion. Vishnu gave her a lengthy discourse justifying his actions saying that to kill evil, sometimes even a god had to stoop to deception. However, to pacify her, he gave her an assurance that she would be worshipped by women for her faithfulness to her husband and her name would become immortal. Also, so that the women do not become widows. Tulasi was pacified by this assurance and committed sati. From her ashes arose a plant which was named after her and till today, the plant *Tulasi* is worshipped by all Hindu women.

In a slightly different version of the story, Jalandhar confident of his invincibility asked Indra, to return the fourteen gems that had been obtained by the churning of the milky ocean. According to him, the gems were his property as he was born of the ocean. Indra did not know what to do with this strange demand and rushed to Siva and Vishnu for advice. On being told of the cause of Jalandhar's invincibility, the gods decided to do something about it Siva, who was proud of his personal attractions, approached Tulasi but she repulsed him. Later Vishnu seduced her by approaching her in the form of her husband. When Tulasi found out the fraud, she cursed him to become a stone. Thus was created the famous Salagram stone. Vishnu in turn cursed her to become a plant.

Another story connected with the plant is that Jalandhar's wife Vrinda was a woman of great beauty and Vishnu was enchanted with her. To entice him away from her, the gods collectively appealed to Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu; Gauri, the wife of Siva; and Swadha, the wife of Brahma for assistance. Each goddess gave a seed to the gods for sowing at the place Vishnu was enchanted by Vrinda. The seeds grew into *Dhatri, Jasmine* and *Tulasi* plants (Embelica myrobalam, Jasminium grandiflorum, Ocimum sanctum respectively). The three plants appeared before Vishnu in the form of three beautiful women and he was attracted by the three beauties and forgot Vrinda. The three women later reassumed the form of plants.

Why the plant is called Krsna-fu/as/ is described in another story. Radha was in love with Krsna and her hold on him was so great that Krsna almost forgot his other duties and spent most of his time with her and the gopies, singing and dancing in the forests of Vrindavana and swinging from the branches of the *Kadamba* (Anthocephalus cadamba) tree on the banks of the Jamuna. To free him from his entanglements with Radha, Narada Muni went to Radha and asked for alms. The unsuspecting Radha promptly offered him anything that he asked her for, presuming that he would ask for the alms of clothes, jewels, foodstuffs, cattle etc. Assured of her promise to him, Narada

Muni asked for alms of Krsna. Radha, having committed herself could not go back on her word. Krsna was given to Narada as alms but Radha became dejected afterwards. Seeing her sad face, Narada relented and~offered~to exchange Krsna for earthly oods provided they weighed equal to the weight of Krsna. Radha was happy once again. She was prepared to barter anything to get her Krsna back. A huge scale was brought While Krsna sat on one pan, on the other pan were heaped material goods. Unknown to Radha, Krsna was an incarnation of Vishnu and no matter what earthly goods she put in the pan to balance the weight of Krsna, the pan with Krsna was always heavier. Having put all her clothes, jewellery, cooking pots, household articles and cattle, there was nothing left for her to put in the balance and she started weeping at the thought that she was ultimately going to lose him. Just then she heard a heavenly voice which suggested that she should put a leaf of *Tulasi* to balance the pans. Trie minute she did that, the two pans containing Krsna on one side and the *Tulasi* ieaf on the other, balanced perfectly and Radha got her Krsna back. And thus the plant came to be called *Krsna Tulasi* or *Kali Tulasi* as Krsna was dark of complexion.

Another story which gives the reasons for *Tulasi* being dear to rsna says that Satyabhama, one of the wives of Krsna, wanted to be arried to him birth after birth and asked Narada Muni for advice. He suggested that she give Krsna as alms to him, as anything given to a Brahman was returned to the giver multifold. Satyabhama did as Narada advised her. Narada then started for the celestial heavens with Krsna carrying his Veena. When the other wives of Krsna came to know of this, they reviled Satyabhama for her presumption and begged Narada to return Krsna to them as they also had a right on him as his wives. Satyabhama, they said had no right to give away in alms what did not solely belong to her. Narada told them thfct it was sinful to accept charity from *a* Brahman but if they wished to get Krsna back, they could buy for his weight. This sounded a very reasonable proposition to the wives. A huge balance was then brought. Krsna sat in one pan of the scales and the wives put all their gold ornaments on the other pan. But Krsna's pan continued to be much heavier. Then Rukmini, the chief queen of Krsna, who was not present at the time, was asked to come and suggest *a* solution. She was the only one among the wives who was aware of Krsna's divine nature. She asked the wives to remove their ornaments from the pan and instead to put a leaf of *Tulasi. As* soon as this was done, the pan with Krsna sitting in it went upwards. Rukmini then told the other wives that *Tulasi* plant-was more-dear to Krsna-therrall of them put together.

According to some tribal myths, when Vishnu as Kjsna outraged the modesty of Vrinda, she cursed him for having approached her in the guise of her husband and said: "I shall be bom in the form of the sacred *Tulasi* plant and you will have to bear my leaves on your head for the wrong you have done to me". Krsna repented and granted her desire and now nothing is more dear and acceptable to him than *Tulasi.*

From Wollheim's book we learn that the *Tulasi* is one of the holiest trees of India, because it is believed that the goddess Sri has been incorporated in it. Because of this the goddess has the name: *Tulasi.* The tree gets divine honours and sacrifices are brought in front of the tree. It is written about this tree in Krijayogasara, Indra and all other gods should always honour this superb *Tulasi,* granting result to the four endeavours. The *Tulasi* is, as is said, on earth, in paradise and in the netherworlds difficult to obtain, therefore, whoever wishes to reach the fruit of the four endeavours has to honour her. Wherever a *Tulasi* tree spreads, there will stay the gods Brahma, Vishnu, Siva and all other gods. Kesava always stays in the middle, Prajapati on the top and Siva in the stalk of the *Tutasi* leaves. Lakshmi, Saraswati, Gajatri, Chandika, Sachi and the other goddesses are staying in the *Tulasi* flowers, Indra, Agni, Samanas, Nairita, Varuna, Pavana, Kuvera live in the branches of this tree. Aditya and other planets, all visvas (semi-divine), Vasus, Munis and all Devarishis, the Vidyadhara, Gandharva, Siddha and Apsara go to the *Tulasi grove* and always stay there. Where the goddess Tuiasi dwells, the goddess dear to Vishnu, comprising all the other gods, there you will find all the other gods. Ganga, Yamuna, Narmata, Saraswati, Godavari, Chandrabhaga and all other rivers and holy ghats, as many as there are on earth within the middle of ten million worlds, they all go to the *Tulasi* forest and make their dwelling there. Who absorbed by devotion honours the *Tulasi,* honours as well Vishnu, Siva and all the other gods?

Those, who cut the blades of grass, growing near the root of *Tuiasi,* Hari will take from them the deadly sins off their bodies. Anyone, who in summertime waters the *Tulasi* with fragrant and cool water, he gets eternal bliss. Whoever spreads a carpet or umbrella over the *Tulasi* during the hot season, he will be delivered of all sins. People watering uie *Tulasi* in the month of *Vaisakh* (April) with uninterrupted flowing water, they get the reward equal to a horse sacrifice. Whoever merely sprinkles a single drop of water on the *Tulasi,* he shall reach, freed from all sins, paradise. The Fortunate one, who only once sprinkles milk on the *Tulasi,* in his house the goddess of luck will stay for ever. But now listen to what happens to the one, who annomts and rubs cow-dung to the root of the *Tulasi.* As many particles

of it as are made liquid, O Jaimini, as many thousand kalpas he will enjoy with Brahma. Who places at the root of *Tulasi* a lamp in the evening, he shall go, accompanied by ten million relatives to the palace of Vishnu. Who ever protects the *Tulasi* from cattle, goats, camels, donkeys, young buffalos and children, he shall be protected by Kesava himself. Anyone who devotedly plants *Tulasi,* he will go, when he dies, to highest bliss. The noble one, who, early in the morning and full of devotion, looks at the *Tulasi,* he shall get the reward of looking at Vishnu. The devoted one who worships the *Tuiasi,* his life-duration, his strength, glory, wealth and offspring shall always increase. By naming *Tulasi* all sins are extinguished, by touching the *Tulasi* all pains of men will perish. Whoever eats a beautiful leaf of *Tulasi* driving out all sins; all desires in his body shall be gone at once. The man, who wears a garland of *Tulasi,* in his body sin cannot dwell. The man, who carries on his head water drawn from *Tulasi*-leaves, he survey gets the reward -which is derived from bathing in the Ganges. The man, who'honours the beautiful *Tulasi* with *Durva* grass (Pao cynasuroides) flowers and pure sacrificial food, he gains the same reward as for offering to Vishnu. Why should anyone, who has honoured the divine with virtue, wealth, wishing goods and giving and purifying *Tulasi* with sacrifices, flowers, precious fragrance, melted ghee and lamps, why should he do the ceremony to honour Vishnu's feet? Hari, the-king of the worlds, the enemy of Mara will be happy about all those, who plant at pure places, to be worshipped by the multitude of gods, causing pleasure to Hari, the *Tuiasi* and he will grant all of them the highest place to stay in. Sacrifices, vows, devotion to ancestors, prayer to the eternal one, pious gifts and whatever men do as good works near the pure foot of *Tulasi,* all these will be truly eternal." Any pious work a man does on earth without the *Tulasi,* so dear to Narayana, is useless because the lotus-eyed god is not happy about it. The one, who during a journey full of devotion looks at the beautiful and pure *Tulasi,* he immediately receives by Hari's grace complete reward for his journey. These, my words are reliable. The undivided sovereign of the world, the Infinite, he himself takes, not regarding the Mandara (Erythrina indica), the Jasmin, the lotus and other fragrant flowers; the Tulasi endowed with all good points and full of delight, he takes her even if she *is* withered, she can still remove many sins. The offenders who tear out the *Tulasi,* the plant bearing eternal life, even without wishing and knowing and throws her to the ground, Nrihari (Vishnu) who loves the *Tulasi* will take luck, offspring and life from them. Sinful people who urinate or leave excretions or used gargle-water in *Tulasi* forests, Hari will take away their wealth and everything else. Fingers, collecting *Tulasi* leaves for puja of Narayana, are

richly rewarded. Prayers used by the Vaishnavas during the time of collecting *Tulasi* leaves, I shall now tell you, listen. "O Mother *Tulasi* who causes happiness to the heart of Govinda, I collect you for puja in the service of Narayana. Worship to you! Kesava without you has no happiness at *Parijta* (Nyctanthes arbor-tristis) and other fragrant flowers, therefore I pluck you, o beautiful one! Without you, O blissful one, deeds are without fruits. Therefore, goddess *Tulasi,* I pluck you, be benevolent towards me. Because in my heart I am burdened to pluck you, be kind towards me, world Mother *Tulasi!* I adore you!'

After the Vaishnavas have said these prayers and have beaten together their hands three times, they collect the leaves of *Tulasi.* Then the leaves of *Tulasi* will be so carefully taken up by the wise men, that not a branch of the *Tulasi* tree will be shaken, because if by collecting of leaves a branch of the goddess is broken, the heart of Vishnu, *Tulasi's* husband, is harmed. If an old leaf falls from the top of a branch to the earth, even by that it is, possible to honour Govinda, the defeater of Madhu and Kaitabha. The one, who with beautiful *Tulasi* leaves honours the superb eternal one, he receives without delay everything, what he desires ...,"

It is further said of the *Tulasi: 'Tulasi* even is the holy Lakshmi, the wife of Bhagwan, therefore the wise ones do not consider her from the point of Botany. Just like a human being on earth thinks piously of the *Tuhsi,* in the same way Indra and the other gods worship her in heaven. Where this Tulasi is, equal to the-highest being, there is all-bliss. What-I-say-is reliable. Who, if he has been an ever so great a sinner, at the hour of death obtains water drawn from over a *Tulasi* leaf, he shall get Hari. Who at the hour of his death carries a stroke of earth formerly part of the earth of the *Tulasi* root, he £oes, freed of his terrible sins to the dwelling of the disc thrower (Vishnu). On whose mouth, head or ears at the hour of death a *Tulasi* leaf is laid, his master is not Bhaskari (Yama).

Brahmins consider the plant as a wife of Vishnu. But in Kerala, the Nairs associate the plant with Siva, According to them, *Tulasi* is sacred to Siva and by worshipping *Tulasi* daily; they don't have to go elsewhere for worshipping Siva. They believe that by drinking the water in which a few leaves of *Tulasi* have been soaked, they can cure themselves of all kinds of disease.

When a Brahmin is dying, a plant of *Tulasi* is put before him on a pedastal and *puja* is offered to it, after which a small piece of its root is placed in the mouth of the dying man and its leaves on his face, eyes, ears and chest. He is then sprinkled with *ganga-jal, the* holy water of the river Ganges with a twig

of *Tulasi* which has been dipped in it, amidst the chanting of the word, *Tulasi, Tulasi, and Tulasi.* The man dies feeling assured that he will *go* straight to heaven.

A branch of *Tulasi* offered^to Vishnu in the month of Kartika (Oct.-Nov.) is considered more pleasing to the gods than the offering of a thousand cows. A spray of *Tulasi* dipped in Saffron and offered to Vishnu is believed to assure one of becoming like Vishnu and partaking in his joys anti happiness. To offer a twig of *Tulasi* to anyone suffering from anxieties and cares is sure to secure a satisfying ending of his difficulties. One obtains pardon from all sins by merely looking at it; gets purified by touching it; gets cured of all sins by worshipping it.

On the eleventh day of Kartika (Oct-Nov.), special *puja* is offered to *Tulasi* after which the ceremonial marriage of *Tulasi* to God Narsi is performed, and then only the marriage season is declared open. Marriages stop being performed after Ekadesi in the month of Asadha (July). Women'pray to *Tulasi* for the safe return of their husbands and sons who have gone on a journey. *Tulasi* is also worshipped by virgins desiring a husband, on the fu.l rnoon day of Aswin.

The plant is believed to be a killer of demons, i.e. Bhutagni, and is therefore planted in houses so that no evil spirits would come near it. Its worship removes sins and brings wealth and happiness to the devotee. The leaves of *Tulasi* are never plucked on Tuesdays and Sundays or ever boiled as that torments the soul of the plant.

The seeds of *Tulasi* are believed to have the property of killing passion. This led to a curious custom of giving grounded seeds of *Tulasi* to young widows so that their chastity was preserved.

When an eclipse is announced, to avoid the evil influence of it, *Tulasi* leaves sprinkled with the Ganges water are put in jars containing drinking water and cooked food, and are thus kept pure while the eclipse lasts. The plant which is an aromatic herb and scientifically proved to have many medicinal properties, probably gave rise to these beliefs.

ORYZA SATIVA

Family Gramineae

Sanskrit: Mana, Dhanya

Hindi: Dhan, Chaval

English: Rice

Rice is considered a fertility symbol the world over. In India, rice is used on all auspicious occasions. This is also because rice is a wholesome food, giving strength and virility to men. There is a strong belief that rice eaters are more fertile.

To the Hindus, Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth. Rice being the stable food of-the majority of Indians, it is also associated with wealth and therefore, rice is considered as the goddess Lakshmi and is offered in all religious ceremonies. Rice is worshipped as Lakshmi on the full moon day following the Durga *puja.* In Bengal the ritual of rice worship as Lakshmi is repeated on every Thursday of *Agrahayana* (Nov.-Dec.) or *Magha* (Jan.-Feb.) and paddy stalks or unhusked paddy is worshipped as the goddess herself.

As was told to me by Mrs B. M. Patel, rice is held sacred by the Buddhists because when after long meditation, Siddharta's body became emancipated due to starvation and austerities, it was rice cooked in milk that revived him. According to the story, Sujata milked one hundred cows and made fifty cows drink that milk. Then she milked those fifty cows and gave twenty five cows that milk to drink. Again she-milked those twenty five cows and-gave ten-cows-to— drink that milk. Ultimately she milked ten cows and gave one cow the milk to drink. It was the milk of this last cow that was very light and nourishing. Sujata cooked new rice thrashed by herself with sugar and the milk from this cow and gave it to Siddharta to eat and that revived his strength after the prolonged austerities he had undergone. Since it was the rice pudding that saved the life of Siddharta, rice came to be held sacred by the Buddhists. It is the new rice that is used for religious ceremonies and not the old rice which is preferred for cooking. Rice being one of the earlier cereals that were known to man, it started being associated with food and is often considered to be Prajapati or Janardana "and is worshipped as such. The custom of sprinkling rice on the bridal couple or offering of rice by the bridal couple to their patron household deity dates back to almost prehistoric times and is prevalent all over the world, this symbolic reference of rice to fertility being universal. Rice is believed to scare demons, particularly those that check the fertility of the union. From this belief perhaps stems the old marriage ritual of pouring rice into the sacrificial fire by the bride and the bridegroom and the usage of presenting rice tinged with tumeric powder as invitation to the wedding feast Among more affluent societies saffron is used instead of tumeric powder to colour the rice. In certain parts of India the bridal couple during the marriage ceremony, stand, each on a pile of rice and

the guests silently throw a few grams of rice grain on the pile at the close of the recitation of each text.

Whatever may be the local variations of ceremonies connected with marriages or for begetting offsprings, rice is always a part of the ingredients used on such functions. Rice being held sacred, it is used for all religious ceremonies, even at the time of oath taking of a king or at the *namkaran* or the ceremony of naming the child. Rice offering stands for the perception of Existence, Consciousness and Experience in all things."

PANDANUS ODORATISS1MUS
Family Pandanaceae

Sanskrit: Ketaki

Hindi: Keura

English: Pine

One day Siva was playing a game of dice with his wife Parvati. Parvati defeated him. He felt ashamed of himself at having been defeated by a woman and hid in the *Ketaki* woods. To forget his humiliation, he got absorbed in deep meditation. Parvati sensed his feelings and wanted to bring him around. She approached him in the form of a young beautiful woman and tried to entice him back to herself. But with his eyes closed and absorbed m deep meditation as he was. Mahadeva did not see her or feel her presence. Parvati then approached him wearing *Ketaki* flowers in her hair. The sweet scent of the *Ketaki* flowers attracted Siva's attention and he was disturbed in his prayers. Getting annoyed at being thus disturbed, he cursed the *Ketaki* flowers.

Another legend giving the reason for Siva to curse the plant says that from the primordial waters arose a fiery linga that kept on growing in size. Both Vishnu and Brahma were astonished to see such a fiery sight and not knowing what the linga signified, decided to investigate the matter. Vishnu dived into the primordial waters to find its lower end and Brahma flew high up the heavens to reach its tip. He flew higher and higher but the linga kept on rising higher than Brahma could fly. Vishnu could not find its depth and Brahma could not reach its summit.Ultimately both Brahma and Vishnu came back without having found the secret of the linga. The linga then burst open and Siva appeared before them standing within the linga. Seeing Siva

in the linga, both Brahma and Vishnu bowed before him, accepting his supremacy.

According to the story, *Ketaki* bore false witness to Brahma, saying that he had reached the summit of the linga and for rhis falsehood, *Ketaki* was rejected by Siva. According to *Skanda Purana* (1.1.6), Brahma was denied the worship for uttering this falsehood.

The flowers of *Ketaki* are worn by girls in their hair to win lovers. But the Nair giris do not use its flowers for adorning their hair because the plant was cursed by Siva.

Ketaki is a densely branched, rarely erect, evergreen tree growing in the low moist swampy places in the Andaman Islands and on the coastline of. India. The plant with strong roots and with its trunk studded with short prickles is aphrodisiac and induces Isleep. Its seeds are supposed to cure wounds of the heart, perhaps symbolic of heartaches. From the plant is prepared an essence called *Keura* which is used 'extensively in the preparation of cooling drinks called sherbets;

PANICUM MAXIMUM

Family Gramineae

Sanskrit: Eraka

English: Rushes, Guinea Grass

At the holy place Pindaruka in Gujerat, Rishis Kanva, Viswamitra and arada were engaged in prayer. Some young boys of the Yadava race decided to play a prank on the holy sages. They dressed Samba, the son of Jambavati and Krsna, as a young girl and conducting him to the sages, asked with due reverence: "What child this female, the wife of Babhru, who is anxious to have a son, give birth to?" The sages by their divine wisdom had found out the trick played on them by the boys and were therefore, angry at this mark of disrespect shown to them. They answered: "She will bring forth a club that shall crush the whole of the Yadava race". The boys were alarmed at this premonition and went and rtiated to Ugrasena all that had occured. After a while, a club was produced from the belly of Samba. Ugrasena, who was afraid of the Rishis curse, got the club ground to powder and thrown into the sea but the particles of dust turned into rushes i.e. *Eraka* grass. But one part of the iron club which was like the blade of a lance could not be powdered by the Andhakas and Vrishnis and this piece when thrown into the sea was swallowed by a fish. The fish after a while was caught by a

hunter called Jara and he extracted the iron piece from its body and used it to top an arrow.

As the time for the destruction of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas neared, terrible portents of the impending calamity appeared. Day by day strong winds blew; streets swarmed with rats and mice; pots and pans cracked for no apparent reason; Sarikas chirped without a break; goats imitated the cries of Jackals; asses were born to Kine and elephants to mules. Cats were born to bitches and mouse of the mongoose. Brahmanas, Pitris and the deities were disregarded by the Vrishnis. Fires when ignited, cast their flames towards the left; innumerable worms of diverse types appeared in cooked food. The Constellations were seen to be struck by the planets. Death personified as a dark woman haunted every home. The Vrishnis, mixing with wine, the food that had been cooked for high-souled Brahmans, gave it away to the monkeys and then started drinking and dancing. Soon the festivities ended in rivalry; dance and music gave place to insults. And as they drank more, the destructive flame of dissension was kindled amongst them and fed with the fuel of abuse of each other and affected by the divine influence, they fell upon one another with missile weapons. Soon the weapons were all used up. Vrishnis then broke the rushes, *Eraka* grass growing high near the ocean, and started using them as weapons. The *Eraka* grass became thunder-bolts in the hands of the Vrishnis and they struck each other with its fatal blows. Krsna then took up a handful of *Eraka* grass and the rushes became a club of iron and with that he slew all those who came before him and in the fearful melee that took place, not a single Yadava was left alive except Krsna and Daruka. Krsna then instructed Daruka to go to Arjuna and inform him of the terrible slaughter that had taken place and to ask him to take the ladies and other survivors like the old and the infirm under his protection as Dwaraka was going to be engulfed by the ocean. Then Krsna looked for Balarama and saw him sitting under a tree and witnessed the soul of Balarama issuing out of his body in the form of a snake. The snake proceeded towards the ocean. In fact the ocean came to meet him as an offering of respect and thus the soul of Balarama entered the waters of the deep. Krsna set engaged in thought, resting his foot upon his knee. Jara, a fierce hunter came and mistaking Kesava for a deer, pierced him at the heel with a shaft. The arrow was tipped with the piece of iron that could not be powdered and had been swallowed by a fish. Jara had caught the fish and had extracted the piece of iron. Krsna could only be killed through his feet as Atri's son Durvasas had made his body "invulnerable" except"the soles of his feet. After the passing away of Krsna,

the ocean engulfed the city of Dwaraka and thus ended the Andhakas and Vrishnis, all killed by the blades of *Eraka.*

With slight variations, the same story appears in the Buddhist *Jatakas.* Sage Kanhadapayana was blessed with divine vision. The sons of Vasudeva approached him to test whether this was true. They procured a young lad, dressed him like a girl and after binding a pillow round his belly to make him look as though he was with child, took him to Kanha-dipayana and asked him: “When will this woman be delivered?” The ascetic perceived through his miraculous vision, the hoak that was being played on him. Feeling insulted he answered: “This man on the seventh day from today will bring forth a knot of Acacia wood. With that will be destroyed the lines of Vasudeva’s, even though you burn the piece of wood and throw the ashes into the river”. The boys called the ascetic false as a man cannot bring forth a child and killed him. When the king heard of it, he was frightened lest the prophecy came true and put a guard on the young man. When on the seventh day, he brought forth a piece of Acacia wood from his belly, it was burnt and the ashes thrown into the river. The ashes floated down the river and ultimately stuck to one side of the pastern gate and from that grew an *Eraka* plant.

One day, the king decided to sport in the water. He, with his followers went to the river. After they had eaten and drunk a lot of wine, singing and dancing started. Under the influence of drink, this soon led to quarrels. The quarrels became serious and finding nothing better to fight with, men plucked the leaves of the *Eraka* plant growing there. As the leaves .were plucked, they became clubs, of Acacia wood in the hands of the men and with them they started fighting each other till one by one they were all killed except VSsudeva, Baiadeva, their sister Anjana and the chaplain. Taking a chariot, the four fled away and came to the forest Kalamattika. There a goblin called Muttika lived. Seeing Baiadeva come, he assumed the form of a wrestler and challenged Baiadeva to a fight. Vasudeva tried to prevent him from accepting the challenge but it was too late. The demon caught hold of Baiadeva and gobbled him up. Vasudeva then went away with his sister and the Chaplain and travelling all night, by morning’came on “the outskirts’of a village.” Sending Anjana and the chaplain to procure food, Vasudeva lay down in the shelter of a bush. At that time, a hunter by the name of Jara, perceived the bush shaking and presuming it to be a pig, shot at it with his spear and pierced the foot of Vasudeva, Vasudeva was over come with great pain and realised that his end had come. After giving

instructions to those left, Krsna's soul departed. Thus excepting Anjana, all the Vasudeva's perished.

PLUMERIA ACUTIFOLIA

Family Apocynaceae

Hindi: Champa

English: Temple tree, Pagoda tree, Frangipani

According to the Hindus, Buddhists and the Mohammadans, the tree is an emblem of immortality, because of its extraordinary capacity of continuing to produce flowers and leaves even after it has been uprooted. For this reason the tree is frequently planted near temples by the Hindus and the Buddhists. The Muslims plant it near the graveyards, where daily, the fresh creamy blossoms fall upon the tombs. The, flowers are offered at the temples by the Hindus and Buddhists.

The Latin name of the plant is derived from Plumeria, a Frenchman in search of means of getting rich quickly. A sooth sayer once told him to look Tor a tree whose flowers were the colour of a frail new moon; whose fragrance overwhelmed the soul at night and which grew near the graveyards and temples. Plumeria travelled far and wide in search of such a tree and finally reached India, where on making enquiries about such a tree, he was advised to go to a certain temple in South India at mid-night on a full moon night and when the scent of the flowers would steal over the garden, shake the tree and it would shed gold coins in plenty.

Flumeria did as he was advised. He shook the branches of the tree and soon the flowers fell in a heap, glistening like gold coins in the moonlight and the sweet scent of the flowers wafted his thoughts to heaven. He then realised the wisdom of real riches in life: the beauty of sweet smelling flowers; the moonlit nights; the immortal skies. And he gave up the idea of amassing earthly riches.

Champa tiee in flower is a favourite motif in temple sculpture.

POA CYNASUROIDES

Family Gramineae

Sanskrit: Durva ghas

Hindi: Darbha

Durva ghas is often mentioned in Rg-veda and Atharvaveda where it is used as a charrn against baldness and anger.

There are many legends connected with the origin of this plant but they all spring from the same source namely the legend of the churning of the milky ocean to extract amrta. According to one story, when the sea of milk was being churned by the devatas and the daityas, with the help of the mountain Mandara as the churning stick and the serpent Vasuki as the churning rope, in order to extract from the ocean amrta which could pfnder the drinker immortal, *Durva ghas* made its appearance, (see Nyctanthes arbor-tristis).

According to another version of the same story, Vishnu, who in his turtle incarnation was supporting the mountain Mandara which was being used as the churning rod to extract the amrta, rubbed off a great .many of the god's hair. These hair were cast ashore by the waves. They took root and became *Durva ghas.*

The third story mentions that the gods got hold of the vessel containing the nectar of immortality and greedily drank it lest the Asuras snatched away the vessel from them. In the haste that took place, a few drops of the precious drink fell on the grass growing on the earth which thus became immortal. This grass was Durva.

The fourth story mentions the appearance of a courtesan of exceptional beauty called Mohini, who in fact was Vishnu himself in disguise. Mohini carrying the vessel containing arnrta was the last one to emerge out of the ocean of milk. Seeing the vessel, a fight ensued between the Devatas and the Asuras for the possession of the nectar. Mohini, however, favoured the gods and supporting the precious vessel on her hips, distributed the contents to the gods. But a few drops of it fell on earth. From the place where they fell, arose the *Durva* grass.

Durva grass is also considered sacred as it emanated from the perspiration of the skin of god- The grass is considered to be a remover of all sins because in its roots Brahma resides; in its middle Vishnu and at the top Siva. The Vaishnuties consider the plant as Vishnu himself and therefore, its use in all religious ceremonies is considered essential as it possesses the virtue of purifying everything. The plant is also held sacred to Ganesh the god who

removes all obstacles and is used in the worship of all gods and goddesses, but is never used in the worship of Durga.

An annual feast is celebrated in honour of the plant on the eighth day of the moon in Bhadra (September) and is called *Durva-ashtmi.* By offering this grass as a sacrifice on that day, with its tips facing east, immortality and blessedness for ten ancestors is secured. The prosperity of the person making the offering increases and multiplies like the *Durva* grass which is a prolific multiplier of the vegetable kingdom.

Durva grass which belongs to the genus Borage is commonly found everywhere except in damp marshy ground and grows to a height of two feet. It is extremely rough to touch and cuts the skin badly. Unlike mcjt sacred plants, *Durva* grass has no known medicinal or culinary properties.

A *pavitram* or an amulet made of 3, 5, 7 stalks of *Durva ghas,* plaited together in the form of a ring is worn by Brahmins to scare away evil spirits and devils. The pavitram sanctified by dipping first in holy water and then placed on the ring finger of the right hand is most efficacious as it possesses the virtue of purifying everything that it touches.

PUTRANJIVA ROXBURGHII

Family Euphorbiaceeae

Sanskrit: Putranjiva, Jivaka

Hindi: Jayaputra

English: The child life tree.

Perpetuation of one's clan or family has motivated so many traditions and beliefs that they are unsurpassed by any other. Though for the continuation of the human race both girls and boys are required, it is only for sons that men crave. The jubiliation at the birth of a son in India has no parallel anywhere in the world and the life of a Hindu household revolves mainly round the male sex. From birth to death, he is entangled in customary ablutions and ceremonies and to this day, the funeral pyre can only be lit by a son and the ceremonies connected with ancestor worship be performed by him- Naturally therefore, the birth of a son is considered most auspicious. It is for this reason alone that the quality of begetting sons is attributed to a large number of plants, for man has from early times been in search of a solution for this predicament. One such plant *is Jivaka.* A medicine prepared from the tree is believed to be a sure recipe for begetting sons. The tree is therefore, sacred to Hindu women, particularly to womtn coming from

orthodox families as their entire future depends on whether they can give birth to a son or not. The Hindu women worship the tree and rosaries made out of the stones of the fruit are used for keeping children healthy. Parents whose children do not survive use the rosaries as they have divine powers and keep the children in good health.

SALMALIA MALABARICUM

Family Malvaceae

Sanskrit: Salmali

Hindi: Simbal

English: Bombax, Silk cotton tree

Why the *Salmali* tree has thorns on its branches is described in a story in the *Mahabharata.* 'Draupadi was the common wife of the five Pandava brothers. She had to be shared alike by all of them, and she was pledged not to show favour to any one of her husbands, it was her custom to massage daily each of her five husbands. But Bhim-sena, one of the brothers, got jealous of the other four and did not want her to massage them. But because of the vow, he could do nothing about it. To show his resentment, he decided to play a prank on Draupadi. One day he put a log of *Salmali* in his bed and covered it with a sheath. The *Salmali* tree till that time had smooth brandies with no thorns on them. He then sent for Draupadi to come and massage him as he was in great pain. Draupadi hurried to his bed chamber and without even removing the bed cover started massaging the log of wood thinking that it was her husband. She kept on massaging the log of wood for a while and finding it inert and getting tired of the effort, she removed the sheet and found that she had been massaging a log of wood. Bhim-sena had been hiding in the room all the while. Seeing her consternation at finding a log of wood instead of him, he burst out laughing. Feeling ridiculous and annoyed, Draupadi cursed the wood and said: "Let thorns grow on it so that no other woman is put in the awkward situation of having to massage it". Draupadi's curre came true; Bhima-sena took this piece of wood and planted it in his garden. It took root and grew into a tall tree but bears thorns on its branches till to-day.

Among certain Oriyan tribes, the tree is believed to be the favourite haunt of Butt Ambae, a female ghost who appears to young men in their dreams to rob them of their virility.

Salmali is a favourite tree in Hindu mythology and often occurs in the *Mahabharata.* Once Yudhishthira sought the advice of Bhishma as to how a weak, worthless and light-hearted person, relying on his strength and having provoked by his speeches, a powerful foe residing in the vicinity, should act when the latter advanced against him in wrath with the intention of exterminating him. Bhishma answered by narrating the following discourse that once took place between a *Salmali* tree and Pavana, the wind.

There was a large *Salmali* tree growing on the heights of Himavat. This tree had been growing for many centuries and its branches had spread far and wide, with a huge trunk and countless leaves. It was loaded with flowers and fruits and was the home of innumerable parrots. Under its shade, travellers from'far and wide, caravans of merchants; ascetics, going on pilgrimage as well as elephants and many other animals used to take shelter. One day, Sage Narada seeing the wide spreading tree addressed him saying that he was delighted by its sight, particularly as birds of diverse types lived on its branches and animals rested under its shade. Seeing the intact branches and leaves of the tree, he attributed it to the friendship and goodness of Pavana, the god of wind, who normally by its great speed and force uproots the tallest and the strongest tree from its site and even the summits of mountains, not to speak of drying up rivers, lakes and seas, including the very nether regions. Narada kept on emphasising the goodness of Pavana and the friendship he showed to the *Salmali* tree which was responsible for the continued protection of the tree,

Salmali being arrogant did not like Narada's praise of Pavana and said: "The wind, O regenerate one, is neither my friend nor mate nor well-wisher. Indeed, he is neither my great ordainer that he should protect me. My fierce energy and might, O Narada, are greater than the wind's. In truth, the strength of the Wind comes up to about only an eighteenth part of mine. When the Wind comes in. rage, tearing up trees and mountains "and other things, I curb his strength by putting forth mine. Indeed, the Wind that breaks many things has himself been repeatedly bfbken by me. For this reason, O celestial Rishi, I am not afraid of him even when he comes in wrath™.

Narada was infuriated at this reply of *Saimali,* and admonishing him at his arrogrance said: "Thy perception seems to be thoroughly perverse. There is no created thing which is equal to the Wind in strength. Even Indra, or Yama or Vaisravana, the lord of the waters is not equal to the god of Wind in might. What need, therefore, be said of thee that art only a tree? Whatever creatures in this world, O *Salmali,* does whatever act, the illustrious Wind-

God it is, that is at all times the cause of that act, since it is he that is the giver of life-Thou art worthless and of a wicked understanding. O *Salmali,* I am certainly angry with thee for thy indulging in such speeches. *Chandanas* and *Syandanas,* and *Salas* and *Saralas,* and *Deva 'dams,* and Vatasas and *Dhanwanas* and other trees of good souls that are far stronger than thou art, have never; O thou of wicked understanding uttered such invectives against the Wind. They know the might of the Wind and bow down their heads in respect of that deity. Thou, however, through folly, knowest not the infinite might of the wind. I shall therefore, repair to the presence~of thafgod for appraising him of thy contempt for him.

Narada then went to the god of Wind and related the conversation he had had with *Salmali* and told him the derogative way *Salmali* had talked of Pavana. Pavana, wild with rage, approached *Salmali* and addressed him thus: "Know that I am the God of Wind. 1 had hereto shown thee grace because Brahma", while engaged in creating the world, had for a time rested under thee. It is for this that thou standest unharmed and not in consequence of thy own might. I shall certainly show thee my power and might".

Thus addressed, the *Salmali* laughed in derision and said: "By giving way to thy wrath, what wilt thou do to me? I am superior to thee in might. They are really strong that are strong in understanding ... not those who possess only physical strength". Then night fell and the wind god said: Tomorrow I shall test thy strength".

Salmali left alone then realised that he was inferior tc the Wind God and to other trees so far as physical strength was concerned but considered himself more intelligent then the other trees. He then mentally concluded: "Relying upon my intelligence, I shall look at this fear that arises from the wind. If the other trees in the forest all rely upon the same kind of intelligence, then verily, no injury can result to them from the god of Wind when he becomes angry and that is why wind succeeds in shaking and tearing them up*. Having settled this in his mind, the *Salmali,* in sorrow, himself caused all his branches to be cut. Without its branches, foliage and flowers, the tree faced the Wind God in the morning as it came raging towards it and ready to tear down the tree. Seeing the forlorn state of *Salmali,* the Wind God addressed him: "Filled with rage, O *Salmali,* I would have done to thee precisely what thou hast done to thyself. Thou art now divested of thy proud top of flowers and thou art now without thy shoots and leaves. In consequence of thy own evil counsel, thou hast been brought under my power".

After narrating the story of *Salmali* and Pavana to Yudhishthira, Bhishma continued: "Hearing these words of the Wind, the *Salmali* felt great shame. Similarly, a weak and a foolish person by provoking the enmity of a powerful one, is at last obliged to repent like *Salmali* had to".

Salmali is considered sacred because Brahma, the Creator, after completing the creative act was exhausted and rested under its shade. *Kuta-Salmali* is a tree (mythological) whose leaves are sharp as swords. Though its blossoms are of gold, it is loaded with thorns of iron and berryl."It is called the Torture tree or the tree of hell. The treej|also called *Yamadrumma,* Yama being the god of death. This name is given because the tree puts forth a large number of flowers but no fruits fit to eat. Its wood is used in funeral pyres.'

According to a forecast made in the *Vishnu Purana,* the principal tree of Kali-juga will be *Salmali;* A large *Salmali* tree grows in the mythical Salmalia-dvipa, thus giving the name to [he island. This dvipa is surrounded by the Sura Sea or the sea of wine.

Salmali tree has various uses. A highly medicinal plant, it is used in local Aryuvedic medicine for curing tuberculosis of the lung. The calyx of the flower is used as a vegetable; its leaves and rwigs as fodder and the cotton from the pods used in filling mattresses.

SARACA INDICA

Family Lcguminoseae

Sanskrit: Asoka, Asopalava

Hindi: Asoka

English: Asoka, common Saraca

Trees in India have always been treated like human beings, endowed with a soul; a heart that weeps with grief and laughs with joy. They have feelings and aspirations like ordinary mortals. *Asoka* trees with its rich red blossoms: "shines like a young warrior bathed in the sanguine shower of the furious fight".

Asoka means 'without grief and therefore, the *Asoka* tree is believed to be a remover of sorrow. Brahma said: "He, who eats eight buds of *Asoka* flowers on the eight day of the moon's increase In the month of Chaitra (April), marked by the asterism Punarvasu suffers no bereavements in life".

There are instances in Indian literature where a tree is addressed as if it was alive and possessed feelings. In the *Mahabharata* for instance,

Damyanti while looking for Nala goes into a. forest of *Asoka* trees. Approaching the first tree looking 'charming with blrvwim its heavy load of foliage resounding with the notes of birds, Damyanti with tears in her eyes began to lament saying: "Oh, this grateful tree in the heart of the forest, decked in flowers, looketh beautiful like a charming king of hills.Oh, beauteous *Asoka,* do thou speedily free me from grief. Has thou seen king Nala, the slayer of foes and the beloved husband of Damyanti".

The tree is a great favourite for commuting suicides and many stories are current about the noose being hung from the *Asoka* tree.

Asoka tree is sacred both to Hindus and Buddhists. Hindus worship it on the 13th day of the month of Chaitra. The tree was blessed to be immortal by Siva because his consort Parvati had worshipped him with the flowers of this tree and therefore, the tree remains evergreen. Its orange red blossoms are used for religious offerings. On *Asoka Shasthi* day, women of Bengal eat the flowers buds. Hindu women in general believe that by drinking the water in which flowers of *Asoka* have lain, they will protect their children from harm and grief.

The tree is considered as a symbol of love and dedicated to Kamadeva, the Hindu god of love. Kamadeva is worshipped with garlands of red *Asoka* flowers. One of the five arrows of Kamadeva is made of *Asoka* flowers. But according to another account the five arrows of Kamadeva through which he perturbs the five senses and inspires lust are made of five fragrant flowers. These are the Blue lotus, the jasmine, the mango flower, the Champak and the Sinsa.

There is a strange belief that the tree will flower only if grown on a spot where a chaste woman has tread. Another belief asserts that the tree blossoms only when vigorously kicked fay a young virgin. A SalabhanjTka or a young forest maiden is often depicted in sculpture kicking the trunk of an *Asoka* tree and the tree flowering profusely.

So it is told that the *Kurbaka* covers itself with blossoms when a lovely woman clasps it; the *Tilaka* (Symplocos racemosa) when she looks at it; the *Asoka* when it is touched by her foot; the mango (Mangifera .indica) when her hand touches it; the *Kesava* or the *Bekula* (Mimusops elangii) when sprinkled with intoxicants from her mouth.

The *Asoka* flower is believed to have certain charms in preserving chastity. It figures in the Indian Epic *Ramayana,* Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, abducted Sita while Ramachandra and Lakshmana were away and

took her to Lanka. She escaped from the caresses of the demon king and found refuge in a grove of *Asoka* trees and thus preserved her chastity.

The *Asoka* tree is worshipped by the Buddhists because according to one account, Sakyamuni or Buddha was born under an *Asoka* tree. The tree is planted near temples both by the Hindus and the Buddhists and its leaves are used in all religious ceremonies. The tree is also associated with the attainment of omniscience of the Jain muni Mahavira. His initiation under this tree according, to the Jains was attended by gods. The tree is sacred to Siva and is planted on the south-east corner of the htfuse or the temple.

SESAMUM INDICUM

Family Pedatiaceae

Sanskrit: Tili, Tila

Hindi: Til

English: Gingelly

Tila has been in use in religious cerenomies from very early times. In the *Mahabharata,* Bhishma in answer to a query of Yudrmhthira as to what objects dedicated to the Pitas, become inexhaustible, said: “Pitris remain gratified for the period of a month if *Tila* seeds and rice and barley’and *Mssha* (Phaseolus Roxburghii), water, roots and fruits are given at *Sraddhas.* According to Manu, *Sraddhas* performed with a copius measure of *Tila* seeds become inexhaustible. Out of all kinds of food, *Tila* seeds are regarded as best. *Tila* offered with fishes at *Sraddhas,* the Pitris remain gratified for a period of two months; Tila offered with mutton they remain gratified for “three months and with the flesh of the hare for four. With the flesh of the goat they remain gratified for five months; with bacon for six months and with the flesh of the birds for seven. With venison called Prishata for eight months and with that obtained from Ruru for nine months and with the meat of Gavaya for ten months; with the meat of *a* buffalo for eleven months; presented with beef at the *Sraddha,* their gratification lasts for a full one year. Payasa mixed with ghee is as much acceptable to the Pitris as beef; with the meat of the Vadrinara (probably a bull) for twelve years. Flesh of the Rhinoceros becomes inexhaustible. The potherb *Kalasaka* (Rumex visicarius or Corchorus Capsularis), petals of *Kanchana* (Bauhinia acuminata) and meat of a goat, thus offered proves inexhaustible”.

After informing Yudhisthira, what objects should be offered to the Pitris at *Sraddha* ceremonies, Bhisma enlightened him about the objects that

should not be offered and said: The species of paddy which should not be offered at *sraddhas* are those called *Kodrava* and *Pulaka.* Among articles used in cooking, Asofoctida, onion, garlic and the produce of *Moringa pterygosperma, Bauhinia variegata,* the meat of animals slain with poisoned shafts; all varieties of *Cucurbits pepo, Cucurbits lagenaria,* black salt, flesh of domestic animals, meat of the animals not slaughtered at sacrifices, *Nigella sativum,* salt called Vid, potherb *Sitapaki* (white *Durva* ghas), all sprouts like Bamboo, *Traps bispinosa,* fruits *of jamvu* (Syzgium cumini syn. Eugenia jambolena), *Sudsrsana* (Menisperma tomentosum).

The offering of that man increases who stands every night for a full year under a *Karanjaka* tree with a lamp for lighting it and holds besides in his hand the roots of the *Suvarchala* (Linum utilissimum) plant

The offering of *Tila* seeds is considered effective in removing sins. Sesame seeds sprang from the limbs of Rishi Kashyapa."

SHOREA ROBUSTA

Family Dipterocarpaceae

Sanskrit: Sala
Hindi: Sal tree

English: Teak tree

As Siddharta Gautama who later became the Buddha was born under a *Sala* tree in the 9th century B.C., the plant is considered sacred by the Buddhists. When Maya Devi, mother of Gautama Buddha, sensed the time of his birth arrives, she experienced a desire to visit her parents. On her way to her parents home, she rested in a grove of *Sala* trees in the Lumbini gardens. Alighting from her carriage, she went under a *Sala* tree and stretched her hand upwards to pluck some flowers. As she did that, Siddharta was born and the *Sala* tree showered flowers on the new bom child. Gautama Buddha also breathed his last and attained Nirvana in a grove of *Sala* trees.

According to a Buddhist *Jataka* story, when Brahmadatta ruled as a king of Benares, he wanted to have a palace built, supported by only one column. He called his architects and ordered such a palace. The builders travelled far and wide in search of a tree big and strong enough to support a palace and ultimately found such a one. It was the *Sala* tree growing in the palace grounds of king Brahmadatta. Getting the permission of the king to cut down the magnificent *Sala* tree, the builders first worshipped the tree in the

customary manner with garlands of flowers, lamps and incense. They then prayed to the deities and vanadevattas who dwelt in the tree to go elsewhere and not to blame them for felling the tree and said: "On the seventh day from now, we shall cut down this tree".

The spirit of the *Sala* tree was overwhelmed with grieft not at his own impending destruction but at the thought that with his death would be destroyed all the young *Sala* saplings growing under him as well as the deities and the vandevattas that dwell on him. So he decided to plead with the king for the life of the vanadevattas and other tree spirits that dwelt on the tree. Having made this resolve, he visited the king at the hour of mid-night, adorned in a divine splendour and addressed him thus: "In the past 60,000 years, I have dwelt in your kingdom, worshipped by all and considered a 'Lucky Tree'. Many a king have come and gone; many a town and house they made, but no one has so far touched me".

The king answered by saying that he had never seen a tree with such a mighty trunk, thick and strong and fit for a king's palace. It was the right trunk to make into the single column support for his palace.

The tree spirit then said: "If you are bent upon killing me, then cut me up piece meal. Cut first the top, then the middle and lastly the roots and that way death would not be painful to me". The king was astonished at the reply given by the tree-spirit and said: "Cutting limb by limb was the most painful of deaths, Why then, do you prefer such a mode of dying?"

The tree spirit answered: "My kith and kin are sheltered by me; also so many deities dwell on me. If you cut me down at once, the crush of one big fall would kill them and that would really be painful to me".

When the king heard that, he was over come with emotion. The *Sala* tree was not worried about his own death jut about the pain that he would inflict upon his dependents by so Joing. The king then told the tree spirit that he would spare him and decided against building the magnificent palace of his dreams.

In this story, Ananda was the king, the followers of the Buddha were the deities which were embodied in the young saplings of the *Sala* tree and the *Sala* tree itself was the Bodhisatta.

There is a Baiga tribal legend connected with the *Sala* tree and some other plants. The tale goes back to the *swayamvara,* i.e. the selecting of a husband by the mother Earth. At the *swayamvara,* the earth put the garland of victory round the neck of Nanga Baiga which annoyed the gods. Not happy with her choice of a husband, they threw dirt on them. After the marriage ceremony

was over, Nanga Baiga took his bride, the mother Earth, home. On the way the mother Earth said to the Baiga that he had not taken her round the pole as was customary. There was a *Sala* tree growing by the road side. Nanga Baiga caught the plait of his wife and she caught the tuft of his scalp lock and thus they went round the tree seven times. Since then the *Sala* tree has become sacred to the Baiga tribe.

When mother Earth and Nanga Baiga were going round the *Sala* tree, they went so fast that they fell down violently in opposite directions. The resuft was that the hair of the two came off and fell on the ground. From the hair of the Nanga Baiga appeared spear grass (Andropogan contortus) and the mother Earth's hair turned into the thatching grass (Pollinea argentea). The Baigas till Jpday put the spear grass in the thatch of their roof which symbolically to them represents the hair of the Nanga Baiga, for which reason their women are not allowed to climb the roof,

Sala tree figures in the *Ramayana* also. Ramachandra and Lakshmana were in search of Sita who had been abducted away by Havana, the demon king of Lanka. In their wanderings through the forest, they came across the vanquished and exiled monkey king Sugreeva. He had been defeated by his brother Vaali and exiled from his kingdom and lived in mortal fear of his brother whom he hoped to vanquish one day and recover his throne and his wife. But Sugreeva saw no way of defeating his brother who was mighty and brave like Indra and from whom he had received a divine necklace of great potency which made him invulnerable.

Sugreeva on meeting Ramachandra and Lakshmana promised to place his entire host of vaanars i.e. monkeys at the service of Rama to rescue Sita from the clutches of Ravana, if Ramachandra first helped him to regain his kingdom £nd his wife. Rama promised to do so but Sugreeva who was aware of his brother Vaali's valour and strength was apprehensive whether Rama's strength would match that of his brother. This doubt assailed him again and again. The strength of Vaali was an impassable barrier for Sugreeva and even though Ramachandra had promised to side with him, Sugreeva still had his doubts about Rama's strength. He wanted to measure Rama's ability to kill Vaali but he could not be discourteous and betray his suspicions. One day he approached Rama-chandra and very cautiously told him of Vaali's strength. Lakshmana, who was also present, understood Sugreeva's doubts. To give confidence to Sugreeva and to put an end to his doubts, he suggested that Rama should demonstrate his strength. Thus approached by Lakshrnana, Ramachsndra bent his bow and pulling the string, shot an arrow at seven trees, of *Sala* standing in a row. The arrow

pierced the trees and then returned to Rama's quiver. Seeing it is miracle, Sugreeva was happy and full of confidence at Ramachandra's ability to slay Vaali. Since this was no ordinary feat, Sugreeva was convinced that Ramachandra was no ordinary mortal. From that day *Sala* tree was associated with Vishnu as Ramachandra wai his incarnation and it is held sacred by Hindus.

In India, those desiring offsprings worship the tree when it is in full biossom. In Bengal certain tribes use the branches of the *Sala* tree for marriage ceremonies and the tree in general is associated with marriages. It is one of the most valuable of India's timber trees and the tribesmen eat the seeds and young leaves of the plant, and use the resin as incense.

STERCOSPERMUM SUAVEOLENS

Family Bignoniaceae

Sanskrit & Hindi: Patali tree
English: Bignonia

This is a tall, deciduous tree and possesses large purple coloured bilabiate, trumpet shaped flowers borne in trichotomous panicles. The plant is associated with Siva worship.

According to a tale told in the *Hari-Vansa,* King Himavant and his wife Mena had three daughters. The eldest was called Aparna which means without a leaf and the two younger daughters were called Eka-parna and Eka-patali, both names meaning the same i.e. one leaf. These appellations were given to them as they practised extraordinary abstinence and austerities to win Lord Mahadeva as their husband. The two younger sisters managed to live on only one leaf of Bignonia but the eldest managed to subsist even without that. Every 2000 years Ekaparna performed penances under a Banyan tree (Ficus bengalensis) and Eka-patali performed penances under the wood of Cerasus puddam. This distressed her mother very, much and she was worried about her daughter's health and life and in desperation cried out; 'U-ma', which means: oh don't. Since that time Aparna came to be called Uma and won Mahadeva as her husband and the Bignonia leaf on which she and her two sisters subsisted came to be associated with austerity and Siva, and the *Patali* tree became sacred.

TAMARINDUS INDICA

Family Caesalpiniaaceae

Sanskrit: Tintrini

Hindi: Imli

English: Tamarind

The name Tamarindus is derived from the Arabic name Tamar Hindi, meaning Indian date.

According to a Birhor tribal story, the reason why *Tintrini* leaves are so small is because Ramachandra, Lakshmana and Sita while on their exile of fourteen years came to a forest which grew *Tintrini* trees. The *Tintrini* those days had large, well developed leaves. Ramachandra, his wife and brother made a hut under it. The large leaves of the tree sheltered them well. Rama said that they were supposed to suffer privations and inconveniences during their exile: But this tree was sheltering them from rain and giving them protection from the intense heat and cold which were city comforts. So he ordered Lakshmana to shoot at the leaves and split them. Lakshmana did as he was told and shot at the leaves with his bow and arrow and since then the leaves are finely divided.

The Dhanwar tribal story is almost similar except that the reason for Lakshmana to srfoot an arrow at them is different. During the rainy season, Sita was cooking the food under a *Tintrini* tree but the rain kept on coming through the leaves and putting out the fire. Ramachandra was enraged at this anJ ordered Lakshmana, his younger brother to send a letter of protest to Lord Indra, the god of rain asking him to stop the rain. Lakshmana tied the letter of protest to an arrow and shot it at the heavens. The rain subsequently stopped but the arrow as it went passed the leaves, split them into shreds and since that time they have remained small and divided.

According to an Oriyan tribal tale, Bimma had planted a Plantain tree which has large leaves. Ramma was jealous of Bimma and to rival him, he planted a tree of *Tintrini* which those days also had large leaves. Bimma did not like Ramma planting a tree also. So he sent a parrot to break the leaves of the *Tintrini* tree into bits which he did and its leaves have remained small since then.

Tintrini tree got fame in the Hindu mythology because of Usha, the daughter of Parvati and it is in remembrance of her that no salt is taken in the month of *Chet* (April-May) but instead food is seasoned with Imli i.e. the pulp of the Tintrini fruit which is sour to taste.

The story goes back to the creation of Ganapati or Garsesha, the elephant headed god. One day Siva was coming after his bath when he saw his elder daughter Usha playing with his minor son Ganesha.

Siva was in an angry mood and finding Usha and Ganesha playing and oblivious to his presence, his anger rose further and he cut off his son's head. Parvati lamented the death of her son and insisted that he be brought back to life. To appease her, Siva replaced the severed head of his son by that of an elephant's and thus revived the child. Usha, who witnessed the scene was so frightened that she hid herself in a barrel of salt When Parvati discovered her in a barrel of salt, she was annoyed with her for not looking after her brother who had to have an elephant's head because of her negligence. She cursed Usha to be born on earth as the daughter of the demon Banasura of Tezpur in Assam. According to a slightly different version, Usha was the daughter of Banasura and he had given her to Parvati for adoption.

In either case, Usha protested that on the earth she would die unrecognised and asked Parvati for forgiveness. But a curse once pronounced could not be revoked. Parvati, however, relented and gave Usha a boon that in her memory no salt would be taken in the month of *Chet* but instead the juice of the *Tintrini* fruit would be used to season the food. This was because Usha had hid herself in a barrel of salt to escape the wrath of Siva. Because of Parvati's curse, Usha was bom on earth as the daughter of Banasura, a demon of Assam. She married Aniruddha, the grandson of Krsna and went to live with him in Dwaraka.

Tintrini tree came to be associated with the memory of Usha. Chet is a warm month in India and the juice of the fruit of Tamarind is cooling and Usha's memory is commemorated by saltless meals in this month. The fruit pulp is digestive, carminative, laxative and often given in Hver ailments. The fruit or flowers of the tree are not used for any auspicious ceremony as it is sour and there is a common belief that any ceremony where its fruit is offered will turn fruitless.

Imli symbolises the wife of Brahma, the Creator.

TERMINALIA ARJUNA

Family Combretaceae

Sanskrit & Hindi: Arjuna

According to a story in the *Bhagavate Parana* Nalakubera and Manigriva were the sons of the Yaksha king Kubera, the god of-wealth. Power made them arrogant and disrespectful of other semi-divine beings. Once, intoxicated with drink, they were playing stark naked with the Gandharva girls in a river when Sage Narada passed by. The boys were so maddened with power, that they completely ignored Narada. Narada wanted to teach them a lesson and thought that poverty was the only remedy for those who thought highly of themselves. Since the sons of Lokapala Kubera were deep in ignorance, insolence and intoxication, he punished them by converting them into *Arjuna* trees. But he did not make them lose their memory. In fact he said that after one hundred Deva-years, the touch of Sri Krsna shall save them. As a consequence of this curse, the sons of Kubera became a pair of *Arjuna* trees in Vraja.

Once Krsna was fastened to the husking mill and his attention was drawn by the pair of *Arjuna* trees. He remembered the' words of Narada and since he did not want Sage Narada to be proved wrong, he approached the trees, drawing the husking machine behind him and placing himself between the two trees, he uprooted them. As the trees fell down with a crash, two fiery spirits came out, illumining space by the splendour of their bodies. After praying to Krsna, they rose upwards.

The Copies were engaged in their household duties and the crash of the two lofty trees attracted their attention. The Gopas who had witnessed the miracle, narrated to the people of Vraja, what had happened. The liberating of the sons of Kubera from the *Arjuna* trees and the fact that the two boys had lived as *Arjuna* trees for one hundred Deva-years, made the trees sacred.

TERMINALIA BELERICA

Family Combretaccae

Sanskrit & Hindi: Vibhitika

According to a story in the *Mahabharata,* Nala, the King of Nishadha and Damyanti's husband was addicted to the game of dice. Once he lost everything, including his kingdom at gambling. Nala and Damyanti had no choice but to go away to live in a forest. Nala, feeling ashamed and not able

to show his face to Damyanti, left her asleep in a forest and went away to seek his fortune in the world. After a lot of wandering about, he took up the service of the king of Vrihadaswa, as a charioteer under the assumed name of Vahuka.

Damyanti, on waking up and not finding Nala besides her, went back to her father, the King of Vidarbha.

Nala was known for his knowledge of horses and no one could excel him at handling them. As a charioteer of King Vrihadaswa, his fame soon spread and rumours about Vahuka's proficiency in handling horses reached the ears of Damyanti also. Not sure if Vahuka was really Nala, Damyanti hit on a plan to get him to come to her father's kingdom. She announced that since Nala was dead, she will choose another husband at a Swayamvara ceremony. To this ceremony, King Vrihadaswa was also invited in the hope that his charioteer would also accompany him. Damyanti's plan worked and Vrihadaswa accompanied by Vahuka left for the Swayamvara of Damyanti, on the way, they came across a *Vibhitika* tree ladden with fruit on seeing the tree, the king said to the charioteer: "Stop the charioter and behold my proficiency in calculation. All men donot know everything, no one is versed in every science and art. Knowledge in its entirety is not found in any one person. The leaves and fruits of this tree that are lying on the ground exceed those that are on it by one hundred anemones. The two branches ofjhe tree has 50 million leaves and two thousand and ninety five fruits."

Vahuka then addressed the king: "O King, you take credit in a matter that is beyond my perception. I will ascertain what you have said by the direct evidence of my senses by cutting down this tree. Then it will no longer be a matter of speculation."

To this the King replied: "But there is no time to lose." Nala assured Vrihadaswa that he would teach him in time for him to see the Sun rise but only after he had counted the leaves and fruits of the *Vibhitika.* The king desirious of reaching the swayamvara in time, reluctantly told Vahuka to count the leaves and fruits of that tree. Vahuka then speedily dismounted from the charioter and cut down the tree. He was struck with amazement upon finding the leaves and fruits after counting, to be what the king had said. The king then told. Vahuka that he was also proficient at dice. Hearing this, Vahuka begged the king: "You give me the knowledge of the dice and take away my knowledge in Equestrian science". The king agreed to this arrangement and imparted the knowledge of dice to Nala. Nala upon

becoming acquainted with the science of dice, Kali came out of his body, incessantly vomiting from his mouth the virulent poison of Kartotaka. When Kali afflicted by Damyanti's curse came out of Nala's body, the fire of that curse also left Kali's body. Nala seeing Kali was going to curse her as she was the cause of his losing at dice and thus losing his kingdom, but she implored his forgiveness and entreated him not to curse her. Nala controlled his wrath at being thus addressed by Kali. Kali in fear of Nala then entered the *Vibhitika* tree and from that, the *Vibhitika* tree fell into disrepute.

Charms or incantations that are made with a particular mantra, written with a crow's quill, with a composition made of collyrium, the gum of the *Ncem* (Azardirachta indica) tree, poison and the marrow and blood of a human victim, are considered as destroyers of one's opponents of all denominations if hung from the *Vibhitika* tree.

Vibhitika fruits are used as dice; the shape of the fruit nuts forbids any side from being properly on the top.

TERMINALIA TOMENTOSA

Family Combretaceae

Hindi: Saja tree

The following story is recounted as told by Verrier Elwin. According to him, the Gonds of India worship the tree because they consider it as the traditional home of Bara deo.

The reason why the *Saja* tree has no juice in its fruit and bears the mark of five fingers goes back to an anecdote involving two friends, a blind man and a hunch back that lived together. The hunch-back planted a tree of *Saja* and the blind man planted a *Mahua* (Bassia latifolia) tree. The *Saja* tree grew upto be crooked like the hunchback and the buds of the *Mahua* tree would not open.

One day the two men went on a journey. Since the blind man could not see, he was led by his friend the hunchback. The hunchback after a while got tired of his companion and decided to get rid of him. With the intention of killing him, the hunchback cooked a snake for the midday meal and gave it to the blind man to eat. But the blind man smeHed the flesh of a snake and would not eat it. The snake flesh emitted some medicinal vapours which going into the nostrils of the blind man suddenly opened his eyes. Seeing that his friend had cooked a snake for him to eat, he was very annoyed and taking his stick, beat up his hunch back friend so hard that his crooked body

became straight, When the two friends went home, they found that -the trunk of the *Saja* tree had become straight and tli buds of the *Mahua* tree had opened.

When the *Saja* tree bore the fruit, it was sweet and juicy. The hunchback sucked the fruit and squeezed it so hard that it became dry and left the mark of his five fingers on it for eternity. Since then the fruit contains no juice and has five long lines on it

The Korava tribe believes that *TerminaUa catappa,* another species of the same tree is a lucky tree because Rama made a bower beneath it when he was wandering through the forest on his fourteen years of exile with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana.

ZIZYPHUS JUJABA

Family Rhamnaceae

Sanskrit: Vadari, Badari, Vadara

Hindi: Ber

English: Jujabe, Indian Plum

This tree has great significance as it is mentioned at more than one place in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata.* According to the *Ramayana,* the tree is hardy because when Ramachandra and Lakshmana were searching for Sita who had been abducted by the demon king Ravana, they came across a *Vadari* tree and asked him if he had seen Sita anywhere. The trees those days could see, hear and talk like human beings. On being thus questioned by Ramachandra, the tree answered in the affirmative and said that he had in fact tried to save her by holding on to her clothes. It pointed to a rag entangled in its branches and said that it was a part of her dress. The tree then pointed the direction in which Sita had been forced to go with Ravana. Rama blessed the tree for having tried to save Sita and gave it a boon that no matter how badly it was mangled and cut, it will not die and even if a single root of it was left, it will spring up again, putting forth fresh leaves and branches. And that is the reason for the tree's hardiness and ability to grow in arid zones.

The tree is also mentioned elsewhere in the *Ramayana,* A devotee of Ramachandra, a poor Bhilni called Sabari belonging to the untouchable caste, offered the fruit of the tree to Ramachandra while he was on his wanderings in the forest looking for Sita. The Bhilni first tasted each fruit, to find out if the fruit was ripe before offering it to Ramachandra.

Ramachandra accepted the fruit which had been first tasted by the Bhilni, saying that if anything was offered to him with a purity of heart and with genuine feelings; it was as clean and pure as if untouched. Since that time, the fruit of *Vadari* has come to be held sacred and is included in many religious ceremonies and offered to various deities.

Rishi Bharadwaja saw the large eyed Apsara Ghritachi one day, as she passed him by and seeing her youth and beauty his vital seed fell. The Rishi took his seed in his hand and placed it in a cup made of leaves. From his seed placed in the cup was bom a girl of unrivalled beauty. Her father, the great ascetic Bharadwaja, in the presence of gods and Rishis, named her Sruravati. He left her in the hermitage and repaired to the forest of Himavat.- Sruravati, as she grew up, led the life of a Brahma-charm and started practising severe austerities to obtain Indra, the lord of the celestials as her husband. To obtain her desire, she observed diverse kinds of vows and penances. Atlast Indra assumed the form of the high-souled Risht Vasishtha and came to the hermitage. Beholding the foremost of ascetics, Sruravati addressed him: "O adorable one: O tiger among ascetics, tell me thy command. O thou of excellent vows, I shall serve thee according to the measure of my might I will not, however, give thee my hand in consequence of my regard for Sakra. I am gratifying Sakra, the lord of three worlds with vows and rigid observances and 'ascetic penances". Hearing this, the illustrious god answered: Thou practisest penances of the austerest kind. This is known to me. Everything is attainable by penances. Penances are the roots of great happiness. Those men that cast off their bodies after having practised austere penances obtain the status of gods. Bear in mind those words of mine. Do thou now, O blessed damsel, boil these five *Vadari.* To test the devotion of Sruravati, Indra obstructed the boiling of the *Vadari.* Sruiavati, having cleansed herself, began her task, and started boiling the five *Vadari* given to her by Sakra in the guise of Rishi Vasishtha. Sruravati was engaged in boiling the *Vadari* and after a while the day started waning and the fuel got all consumed but the *Vadari* were still not boiled. Seeing the fire about to die, Sruravati began to bum her own limbs to provide fuel for boiling the *Vadari* fruits. She first thrust her feet into the fire and did not at all mind her burning feet, nor did her face change under the painful process.

The words of the Rishi: "Cook the *Vadari* well", were fresh in her mind and she continued to cook those five *Vadari* fruits though the latter showed no signs of softening. At lasfner feet were consumed by Agni. Beholding this sacrificial act of hers, the lord of the three worlds appeared before her in his true form and addressing her said: "I am gratified with thy penance and

thy vows. The wish, therefore, O auspicious one that thou cherishest shall be accomplished. Casting off thy body, O blessed one; thou shalt in heaven live with me. This hermitage shall become the foremost of *Tirthas* in the world, capable of cleansing one from every sin and shall be known by the name of *Vadarapachana* and it shall be celebrated in the three worlds.

Another story that mentions the sacredne'ss of the *Vadari* relates to the visit of Siva to Amndhati, the wife of one of the Rishis. In the *Tirtha* of, *Vadarapachana,* lived the seven Rishis with Arundhati. Once, the Rishis left Arundhati and went to Himavat to gather fruits and roots for their sustenance. While they were living in a forest on the Himavat, a drought occurred extending for twelve years and the ascetics having already built an asylum for themselves, continued to alone, devoted herself to ascetic penances. Pleased at her devotion, the three-eyed Mahldeva, assuming the form of a Brahmana, visited her and asked lor alms, Arundhati told him that the store of food had been exhausted and asked him if he would eat the *Vadari* fruits. Mahadeva asked her to cook the *Vadari* for him Arundhati began to cook the *Vadari* as it pleased the Brahmana. She put the *Vadari* fruits on fire and started listening to a sacred discourse from Mahadeva and the twelve years of drought passed away as if it was a single day and Arundhati never even noticed that she had not eaten for all that period. At the end of the twelve years drought, the seven Rishis returned from the mountains after having procured the fruits. Mahadeva then appeared before them in his true form and praised Arundhati for her penances of cooking for twelve years and lasting all the time. He granted her a boon that the *Tirtha Vadsrapachana* would be the favourite resort of Siddhas and celestial Rishis.

Vadari fruits are offered in worship mainly to Siva. Even though they are associated with Indra also and he is invoked at most sacrifices, he is seldom worshipped separately.

The holy river Ganges arises from the roots of a great *Vadari* tree on mount Kailash.

Vadari or *Badari* is also sacred to Vishnu and Vishnu is also called Badarinath or the Lord of *Badari,* the Jujabe tree. The town called Badrinath, a place of pilgrimage at 10,294 feet above the sea derives its name from the *Vadari* or *Badari* tree. There is a sulphurous spring there and probably an ancient tree cult associated with it exists.

According to the *Atharvaveda* and the *Kaustka sutra,* Kudi, identified as the twig of *Vadari,* was tied to the body of the dead to efface their traces,

presumably in order to render the return of the spirit to the old home difficult.

Though the Sikhs of India do not generally believe in the sacredness of trees, there is one tree of Zihyphus growing in the Golden Temple at Amritsar, which is known as the Tree which removes sorrow'. This particular tree of *Vadari* is held sacred by the Sikhs.

End